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Our daily bread

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GOSTA LARSSON



OUR DAILY BREAD



A NOVEL

NEW YORK

THE VANGUARD PRESS

1934



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2ND. 5/39

DESIGN: ERNST REICHL

Manufactured in the United States of America

by H. WOLFF, NEW YORK, N.Y. 26 '34

TO

MIA LIDBOM

with gratefulness and devotion

OUR DAILY BREAD

1

FATHER is coming! I hear him! He's coming up the stairs!"

"Father! Father!"—A flutter runs through the children as they sit there on the kitchen sofa, waiting impatiently for father to return home from work. They strain their ears and listen intently to the sound of footsteps mounting the stairs.

"Yah, it's he! He's coming now. I hear him!"

"I heard him first!"

"You didn't! You lie! I did! And he promised me something! Ha!"

"He promised me something, too. . . ."

"Be quiet! Keep still!" Hanna warns the children. But she herself becomes quicker of movement. With a touch of the hand she straightens her fresh white apron. She lights the gas lamp. "Now, Britta! Haven't I told you a thousand times to keep still? And you too, Nils—and Vanda and Erland and all of you! I never saw such children! Never once do they obey me. I'll have to tell father, there's no other way."

At this the children put a check on themselves and sit still

as if suddenly turned into dummies—only they are too quiveringly alert and tense. For isn't this the great night of the week? Friday, meaning pay-day, when father has gotten his wages and, true to his habit, will bring home something good, something in a paper bag, candy, perhaps, or more likely pastry—or it could be fruit. The children wonder excitedly and make the wildest guesses. Now, what might it be?

Hanna glances at the table, inviting with its new red oil-cloth and all set and ready for supper. Her face is tinged with a slight flush. "Lovely Hanna," she was called as a young girl, and now at forty-two, in spite of hard work and worries and anxieties, she still retains much of her former beauty. The gentleness of her mouth balances well the severity of a firm chin and straight fine nose. No midnight toil has as yet been able to dim the twinkle in her blue eyes, and what matter a few grey streaks in such auburn hair?

Out on the stairway the footsteps are sounding nearer. A little slow. A little tired. For father has been on his feet all day in the lacemaking shop. He is now on the third flight. Britta, aged six but going on seven, keeps twirling her thumbs, only with a super-effort restraining herself on the sofa. Little five-year-old Nils sits slumped forward, his fair hair in wild disorder, a tragic look in his round blue eyes. For now, just before the great moment when rewards are dispensed and virtues given their due—now it strikes him that he has sheer forgotten to clear that patch of ground. . . .

While on the stairs Peter Hammar's footsteps approach the landing, little Nils remembers clearly the bargain he struck with father last night, the agreement that he should run out to Peter's beloved garden "koloni" outside the borough. "Nils," father had said, "you pick up all the stones you can

find on the patch I dug last Sunday, and I'll give you five öre tomorrow night." Those were his exact words, and Nils had meant to do it first thing in the morning. But then he forgot. —The children hear father stepping across the landing. And now he is turning the door handle. With a glance of reckless defiance at mother, Britta jumps from the sofa.

"Britta, be still!—Vanda!—Marta!" But of no avail. They no longer mind her. And Hanna doesn't care. Supper is ready. And now Peter is home.

Yah, Nils had outright forgot. And 'twas because all day long he had been defending the pioneers against "the wily injuns," those red-skins camped in the yard. From the kitchen window one could see their wigwams made of burlap and potato bags. Freckly Harry was their chief, and didn't he look great the way he'd painted his face with shoe polish and red stuff made of pulverized brick!

"Good evening, Hanna. Good evening, children." Father's voice jerks Nils back to the present. And with a pang he again remembers the patch of ground he's forgotten to clear.

Peter's pleased glance takes in the kitchen with one rapid sweep—the supper table with the red oil-cloth; the shining brass of the oil-stove; the eager children trembling with anticipation; and Hanna in her white apron, brewing the wonderfully smelling coffee.

He hangs his hat and overcoat on their allotted peg in the hall. Having also removed his coat he steps into the kitchen, at ease in his shirt-sleeves. He is a tall, slightly built man with a retiring manner, a lacemaker by trade, a skillful craftsman of the good old school.

He rubs his hands contentedly and sniffs the coffee. The children have their eyes glued on him as he seats himself by

the table. They see him move his plate to one side and put his purse on the oil-cloth. He runs his fingers through his blond hair. The kitchen is hushed. Hanna turns down the buzzing oil-stove to a low, soft humming. There isn't a sound from the children. Only the old beech tree in the yard is murmuring softly, one of its boughs reaching all the way over to the open window. The bough taps lightly at the pane—tap tap. Peter looks at Hanna and smiles. "Do you hear, Hanna?" he says. "The tree is saying good evening to me."

"Yah." She smiles back. Then she asks him: "How did you make out in the shop today, Peter?"

"Hm." He clears his throat. From the sound of it Hanna knows he has troubles.

"That German foreman," she resumes. "Some more of his newfangled ideas?"

"Hm. Yah. He said he would install two machine looms now." Peter raises his eyes to Hanna. She thinks he looks frailer than usual. But perhaps he is only tired after having worked overtime every night and Sunday for these many months.

"We'll be two men less in the shop," Peter says quietly, not taking his eyes off Hanna.

She feels a chill running down her spine on hearing about the machines. And she knows Peter's dread of the modernization carried out in the shop by the German foreman who came but a short while ago with his labor-saving devices, cold, brazen machines turning out in an hour more work than a skilled weaver is able to produce in days.

But she puts on a brave face. "Oh, well. Surely they won't let you go, you who have been there for so many years."

"I think he's aiming to let Sandberg off, and that other young fellow. They have no families."

"Now! There you are! Didn't I tell you?" But she knows what Peter is thinking, that this is just a beginning. However, the next moment she says with conviction, and also with some defiance: "Why worry? As long as we are doing our best I know we shall never lack our bread."

Having said this she herself feels strengthened. And all anxiety disappears from Peter's face as he lowers his gaze to the table. Before him lies the black purse, worn from use, to be sure, but bulging and capable and with a superior air as if aware of its great importance and the promise it holds for all those impatient ones whose eyes are upon it.

Nils also is staring with his tragic blue eyes at the purse. But for him there is no promise and no hope—except if he should keep quiet about having forgotten to clear that patch. And the first thing in the morning he would run to the koloni and pick up every little stone he could find. He could put Karl in charge of the pioneers, and with luck they might be able to hold out against the injuns until he himself came back.

"Hm!" Peter clears his throat; he touches the purse, his expressive craftsman's hand resting on the black leather in his wish to prolong this, the greatest moment of the entire week. He looks less tired now. He has a glow on his face. He smiles. "Yah, Hanna—perhaps we should look at the wages, then?" He never says *my* wages, for the moment he steps inside the door the money, to his way of feeling, becomes the common property of the entire family.

Yah, Hanna is ready. She pulls a chair over to the table and sits down by Peter's side. His hand is still on the purse.

Not until Hanna is all settled does he take out the roll of bills.

“Hm.” He glances about him, satisfied that the children are watching. Then he begins counting the money, with much deliberation and gravity, putting the bills on the table, one by one, smoothing out the creases and flattening them down.—“Five—ten—fifteen—twenty—twenty-one,” up to twenty-five, his standard wages.

He makes a dramatic pause before proceeding to count the overtime and again glances around him with a look of, “Now! Watch!”

And they all do. Hanna leans forward over the table, pretending she is in great suspense. But she has figured out beforehand exactly how much money Peter would bring home tonight, overtime and all. And not only that, but she has also calculated to the penny how it shall be used, divided and distributed to meet the demands of landlord and tax collector, with this sum for that and so much for this.

But she doesn’t let on that she knows, for that would only spoil Peter’s happiness. So she is true to the game she plays every Friday night and does her best to look excited and tense. “Now, Peter,” she murmurs. “Let’s see how much overtime you have. Hurry up, will you? Don’t keep me in suspense like this!”

And Peter goes on counting. “Twenty-six—twenty-seven—twenty-eight. . . .” His count is exceedingly slow, but is not this the money he has earned late at nights, sitting hunched at the loom or bent over some delicate knitting? He has even sacrificed some of his Sundays, instead of pottering about in his koloni as he loves to do.

“—thirty-one—thirty-two,” he is counting while Hanna,

with her most absorbed expression, is slyly wondering how it happens that overtime money always comes in one-krona bills.

"thirty-three—thirty-four—" He sits very erect on his chair now, gravely putting the bills side by side on the table, never on top of each other. "—thirty-five. . . ."

"Yah, Peter," says Hanna, shaking her head. "You are unbelievable. I always said so!"

He pretends not to hear. "—thirty-six—" And with a final triumphant gesture he plays out the last one—"thirty-seven!"

"I never saw such a man!" Hanna exclaims. "You're indeed different from other men who go and waste their money on drink!" This last with a slight turning of her head toward the children so that they may appreciate such a father.

"Hm," says Peter. He hems and he clears his throat. But don't think this remarkable man is done. Oh, no! His eyes gleaming with secret satisfaction, he brings from his pocket a handful of change, silver and copper, in all, seventy-eight öre which he spreads well over the red oil-cloth.

"What a man! What a man!" Hanna wags her head. "Peter, I'm sure there's no one in the world like you!"

He leans back on his chair in the careless attitude of a man far above flattery. But he is pleasantly aware of the admiring eyes that are bent on him and feels himself amply rewarded for the sacrifice of his evenings and Sundays.

Still wagging her head Hanna gathers up the money. But not quite all. She separates from the rest one krona and fifteen öre. "We'll have a bottle of schnaps," she remarks, winking an eye.

"Yah," says Peter. "Hm. I guess so." Because, with the exception of a chunk of cheese for his Sunday breakfast, this is

the only extravagance he allows himself. Never once during his married life has he been known to step into a public house. But he does like a bottle of schnaps. And it lasts him a week, one glass with his dinner each day, and maybe two for Sunday.

Not that his tender conscience doesn't at times cause him to utter a feeble protest against what deep in his heart he always feels to be a wasteful proceeding. "Hanna—perhaps we shouldn't get any schnaps this week, considering we have the king's tax to pay now and everything . . . ?"

"I should say we will!" the otherwise prudent Hanna flares up. "Bother the king! Don't poor hard-working souls owe anything to themselves? We'll pay the tax somehow, and Erland will get his shoes. I may pick up some extra work at the Löwensteins' next week. Yah, indeed, Peter, we'll have our schnaps!"

Erland smiles because he remembers how he once stepped unexpectedly into the kitchen when his mother, thinking herself alone, was quickly swallowing a little drop of liquor.

"Well—and it strengthens me!" she had snapped, apologetically and also put out at having been caught, although Erland tactfully pretended not to have seen. He was not one to grudge his mother a well-needed refreshment, seeing her wet and frozen from her labors in the cold wash-house, her hands swollen and her arms blue-red up to the elbows from constant plunging into the icy rinsing water.

So one krona and fifteen öre is set aside for schnaps. And two kronor is Peter's weekly allowance to cover his running expenses, such as car-fare and the daily bottle of milk he gets for his breakfast in the shop.

Ay, these two kronor per week once enabled Peter to spring

a surprise on even the all-knowing Hanna. 'Twas last Christmas when he presented her with a wonderful new fur-lined coat.

"But, Peter—where did you get all the money?" she asked, for once not feigning her astonishment.

"Hm," said Peter, looking enormously pleased. And that was all Hanna got out of him on the subject.

She racked her brain and went back in memory over her calculations. She figured again and again and weighed every item of income and expenditure. But nowhere could she detect a slip.

At last she became downright uncomfortable and began to have doubts as to her competence in managing her household affairs. "Peter," she begged, "please tell me where you got the money! I won't ever enjoy the coat until you let me know."

"Hm," said Peter, maddeningly secretive, hugely happy. Never in memory had he enjoyed a Christmas more.

And it wasn't his fault that the secret leaked out at last, because Hanna worried the truth out of Volmer, Peter's old comrade in the shop.

"I'll tell you," said Volmer, twirling the ends of his long blond moustache. "But for God's sake don't let him know I've been letting it out. You see, it's this way. Last summer he stopped getting his bottle of milk for breakfast and that saved him ten öre each day. Now, then, I've told you."

Hanna said nothing, but from then on Peter enjoyed his favorite dish of vegetable soup every Wednesday and sometimes on Sunday, and Hanna suppressed with a firm hand the mutinous uprisings of the other members of the family who didn't care for such soup.

But Hanna knows Peter is getting his milk these days as he should. Because, "You tell me if he should drop the milk again," she said to Volmer. "Otherwise don't you ever come to our house anymore on Sunday mornings, tasting my pickled herring with fried eggs and having a schnaps with Peter!—As if he had too much fat on him? He surely needs all the nourishment he can get!"

Yah, Volmer promised he would see to it that Peter got his milk. "And now, Hanna," he pleaded, anxiously tugging at his moustache, "don't be angry at me, will you? As for your pickled herring, it beats everything, and last Sunday I think it was the best ever."

"Ay—" Hanna cast down her eyes. "I thought maybe I had, put a bit too much sugar into it, or no . . . ?"

"No, no! Hanna! No. The herring was just perfect. Exactly the way I like it best!"

"Yah," said Hanna, "I have something special for next Sunday. Now wait and see.—But you watch that Peter gets his milk!"

So this Friday night Peter pockets his two kronor, and Hanna is satisfied they will be used properly.

Now, since all these things have been duly attended to, Peter rises from the chair and steps out into the hall where he does some mysterious fumbling about among the pockets of his overcoat.

The strain of waiting has told on the children, especially on Britta who finds it hard to control the jerky movements of her arms and legs. A hectic flush covers her cheeks. She sits stiffly erect on the sofa, her unblinking eyes on the paper bag father carries with him into the kitchen.

And as for little Nils, he has made up his mind. He knows

it is sinful, but he will keep quiet about having forgotten to clear the patch. He sees no other way of solving his problem, because tomorrow the pioneers will take their final and last stand against the wily injuns and Nils has counted on the five öre to buy Russian fire-crackers, the kind you throw like a stone whereupon they explode with a crack loud as that of a pistol shot.

Five of those crackers, Nils thinks, might suffice to turn the tide of battle in his favor. Only his sins will be very great, for mother has strictly forbidden him to buy Russian fire-crackers ever since the boy next block got his left eye blinded by one. But there are always lots of clumsy fellows around that get things in their eye when they play and then go and spoil all the fun for others.

"Hm!" With a discreet hawk Peter goes back to his chair. Britta's left leg jerks excitedly; her eyes are still on the paper bag which Peter now opens, cruelly slowly, she feels.

"Now—let's see. . . ." He peers into the bag, careful that no one else can view its content. "Hm—Let's see.—Yah!" His hand goes into the bag, then comes out with a cream puff delicately poised between forefinger and thumb. "For you, Marta." He begins with her for, excepting Erland, she is the oldest.

"Thanks, father."

He pauses a moment to enjoy her pleasure. Cream puff in hand Marta returns to her place on the sofa while Britta critically eyes the puff, in her rebellious heart cursing the fate that has flung her in with two older sisters.

"Do keep your legs still, Britta!" mother admonishes her. Hanna has seated herself on a chair, not slumped and relaxed

but with attentive poise as the occasion requires, her hands in her lap while waiting for her chance to serve the supper.

"For you, Vanda," Peter says softly, again with a short pause in which to enjoy himself.

"Thanks, father." Vanda resumes her seat, nibbling at the cake, but by no means spoiling it so soon by a bite.

"It's something with a filling inside," Britta decides. Her legs feel full of electricity. It's her turn now.

Peter's hand lingers inside the bag; he peers into it hard, indecision troubling his face.

Britta is near screaming. Such luck! Wouldn't just something go wrong when her turn came!

But Peter brings from the bag a pastry with a red cherry stuck in the middle. "For you, Britta."

"Thanks." So I got one with a cherry, she thinks, with a quick glance at Marta's cream puff. Shucks! She would much have preferred that! It's so lovely to lick the cream slowly and she never did care for cherries stuck on in this stupid way.

Not that anyone would suspect Britta of such spiteful thoughts. For she acts with perfection the part of a hugely delighted child. With sidelong glances at her sisters she fondles her cake, the tip of red tongue darting out like a sting licking the silly cherry.

"For you, Nils," she hears father say, his voice particularly tender for the youngest child. Oh, misery! Nils is getting a cream puff too! And the cream is wonderful and violet and whipped to a spiraling tip so thrilling to lick!

So Britta licks the miserable cherry instead, furious, and with a nudge at Nils, much as to say: "Whipped cream is nothing at all, even though it should happen to be violet and

made into a spiral tip. But look at me. Lick! Lick! This is something! Who ever cared for cream puffs?"

A slight embarrassment is now evident on Peter's face. He brings from the bag another pastry—the finest so far, in Britta's green-eyed opinion. "Hm," says Peter, turning to Erland. "Eh—hm. Perhaps you would care to taste this. . . ." He smiles sheepishly. It's very difficult now since Erland has begun to grow up. Being past eleven, he is too big for cakes on Friday nights, but Peter can never harden himself enough to exclude him. It wouldn't seem right.

But Erland makes it easy for Peter by graciously accepting the cake. "Thanks, father," he says, careful not to reveal his satisfaction at having received one too. "Thanks—it'll taste good." And to show his appreciation he immediately takes a great big bite.

Peter looks much relieved. He speaks again. "Yah, Nils," he says. "And here's the five öre I promised you for clearing that patch of ground."

Ay, but Nils' hand does not fly to meet the desired coin. Instead he blurts out, his lips trembling on the verge of tears, "I—I forgot to do it. . . ."

"Hm—You'll do it tomorrow, then, won't you?"

"Ya-ah." Raising his blue, tear-dimmed eyes from the floor Nils sees father still offering him the coin.

"Thanks, father." His voice is thick and blubbery, and suddenly he bursts into a loud sobbing.

"Now what's the matter?" Peter asks in bewilderment, looking at the tear-drenched face under the wild tangle of fair hair.

Nils doesn't answer. But he is taking a mighty oath in his heart. He will rise before the sun tomorrow and run straight out to the koloni. Yah, and he'll turn every grain of earth and

pick out every slightest little wee bit of a stone. This he'll do even if it should take him all day and in his absence the leaderless pioneers be slaughtered to the last man by freckly Harry's ferocious injuns.

"He's always bawling!" Britta ventures an acrid remark, the bitterness of which springs from her disappointment at seeing others favored with cream puffs while she herself is compelled to keep countenance by licking that stupid cherry.

"You be quiet, Britta," mother reprimands the girl, stirring from her enforced inactivity on the chair. "Now we'll have supper," she says, and her tone carries discreetly her opinion that this has been a very pleasant interval, but that it is over now.

"And save your cakes until after supper—or you might eat them with your coffee," she issues another order. She is taking things in hand now. Peter has had his turn.

So supper begins. But first there is a brief hush during which Peter gazes silently at the table and, although his still hands are not folded, the children know he is saying a blessing over the food. Mother does the same but she feels the need to fold her hands; she holds them where no one can see them, inconspicuously in her lap, under the table top.

2

THE children were fast asleep when Hanna returned home from her office-cleaning at eleven o'clock that night. They all slept in the living-room except Erland, whose bed was the sofa in the kitchen.

Hanna walked on tiptoe so as not to waken the boy; she moved about softly in the half-light, washing her face and hands and combing her long hair. Then, resting her tired legs, she sat looking out into the somber spring night with its fragile dusk boding the approaching summer.

An expression of pensive melancholy entered her face as she sat lost in thought, her chin resting in her hand. The house was so quiet. Erland moved in his sleep. She rose and went to his side and gently tucked the blanket about him. For a moment she stood looking down upon his small, delicate face, pale in the bluish dusk, then went silently out, cautiously closing the door behind her.

Peter stirred out of his sleep as she got into bed beside him. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Half past eleven," she said. She lay quiet for a while,

feeling the blessedness of rest flowing through her weary body and relaxing her limbs.

Then she asks in a low tone, "Are you awake, Peter?"

"Yah," he says.

"I've been thinking about Erland," she goes on. "Twould be a good thing if we could get him a job. We've so many expenses now—health insurance and taxes and rent and the children needing clothes and what not."

"But he doesn't finish school until June."

"I know. But Fru Landgren told me something. She said they can get a special examination at Easter. Her boy is going to quit. They've a job for him in a carpenter shop."

Silence. The wall clock is ticking away with a monotonous beat. The tenement house is asleep, the weary workers and their wives and children are resting after a day of toil, resting for the morrow's labor. Hanna and Peter lie in the bed, thinking. Presently little Vanda gives a faint cry, troubled perhaps by some bad dream as she sleeps with Britta and Nils in the pull-out sofa. "Her stomach is upset," Hanna reflects. "I'll have to give her some medicine in the morning."

She again speaks to Peter. "What do you think?" she asks. "Twould be good if he could help earn a little money."

Peter sighs; his voice comes hesitantly out of the dark. "Seems a pity not to let him at least finish elementary school."

"But he can go to night school, can't he? He'll soon make up for it. He has a good head."

"Yah," Peter says slowly. "Yah—there's a lot to pay out, and God only knows how much longer they'll let us work overtime in the shop."

"I'll go and speak to the teacher," Hanna decides. "Then he can quit at Easter."

Peter sighs again. "Ya-ah. Only I wish he could have finished the term."

They both lie silent, listening to the stillness of the night that seems vast and big with the small ticking of the clock within it.

After a while Hanna knows from Peter's measured breathing that he has fallen asleep. But she herself lies awake, thinking.—"A change," the fortune-teller had said, reading the thumb-marked cards. She had predicted a change for the house. Now what could that mean? Hanna wondered uneasily whether it had anything to do with the lacemaking shop and the German foreman with his machines and things. "A change in the house!" She would have liked to talk it over with Peter but knew he disapproved of fortune-telling. And as she had paid fifty öre for the visit there was no need of letting him know.

Hard pressed and harassed by various troubles, she had gone in secret last night to one reputed to see very clearly into the future. Fru Holm was her name. You would never know by her looks that she was so smart, being, if anything different, a bit more sloppy than most housewives, a stout woman of fifty with a pale, greasy face.

"And there's a letter coming from across the water," said Fru Holm, putting a thick finger on one of the shiny cards, the whole pack arranged on the table in the shape of a star.

Hanna quickly bent forward, staring at the small mute card as if she hoped it would reveal to her the content of this coming message. Then, on looking up into the face of the fortune-teller, she thought she noticed a slight contraction of Fru Holm's otherwise untroubled brow.—Did she know more than she told? Hanna wondered as she sat tensely on

the edge of the chair. She wished she could have penetrated the mask of that placid face and had a glimpse of the secret knowledge she suspected was being kept from her.—A letter? Could it be from her brother Bertil, perhaps, who about two years ago had worked his way to America on a ship and, after having written one letter telling how he had escaped ashore, never was heard from again? Could it be he?

“You have money troubles,” said the fortune-teller, boring her eyes into Hanna.

“Hm—” Hanna compressed her lips and lowered her gaze onto the table, determined not to give Fru Holm any clue. No, indeed! She had paid her fifty öre and she wanted what was coming to her!

Fru Holm gathered up the cards and shuffled them smartly. She put the pack face down on the table and said, “Cut them now—towards you—and make your wish.”

An absorbed expression came into Hanna’s face as she lifted a part of the pack. “Money!” she wished and tried with all her might to visualize an abundant inflow of kronor that would make their existence less difficult. “Money—” Then, feeling a sting of guilt because of her worldly request, she added apologetically in her heart, “And health—and happiness . . . please!”

“You have made your wish?” asked the fortune-teller, picking up the cards and shuffling them again.

“Yah,” Hanna quietly replied, looking on silently while Fru Holm divided the cards into little heaps. “For yourself,” the fortune-teller chanted monotonously, “For your friend. For your house. What you don’t know. . . .”

—Hanna sighed where she lay beside Peter. She was sleepy and couldn’t remember all the fortune-teller had said. Fru

Holm had spoken of a visitor to the house, but it could be Volmer coming next Sunday to have dinner with them. She had said things were looking very good for Anna and her friend—that meant Peter, of course—so 'twas a comfort and well worth fifty öre.

The clock struck twelve, the metronome stopped, sounds trembling solemnly on the midnight air. Anna closed her eyes and heard in a half-daze how the clock struck in the next flat. Things got confused in her mind. She dreamt she was playing cards with the king and he won every blessed game.

“You’re cheating!” she cried.

The king giggled.

Then her brother Bertil stood by her side. “Here’s money,” he said. “I’ve brought a whole trunkful from America.”

“I’ll take it,” chuckled the king. “Why—you haven’t paid your taxes!”

3

THE very next day Hanna wrapped her shawl about her, went to the school and knocked on Herr Noren's classroom door. It was opened by the teacher himself, a tall earnest-looking and somewhat countrified man of thirty-five.

"How do you do," said Hanna. "I'm Erland Hammar's mother. Hm—I would like to speak a word to you about the boy."

"Yah, certainly," Herr Noren replied and stepped out into the corridor. Through the open door Hanna had a glimpse of the room with the forty-odd restless boys who heartily welcomed this interruption of the dull grammar lesson.

"What I wanted to ask is this," Hanna began when Herr Noren had shut the door. "I wonder—could Erland have a special examination at Easter, do you think?"

Herr Noren's face darkened. "Does Erland want to quit?" he asked after a pause.

"No—o, he doesn't know yet but we would like to have him start working. . . ." Hanna's voice trailed off into nothing. She shrank before Herr Noren's almost hostile look.

Something sad entered his face and he stood absently fingering his watch chain. From inside the classroom came a disturbing clatter of desk tops, a loud racket mingled with the noise of stamping feet, of laughter and muffled shouts. "Excuse me a minute," said Herr Noren. He summoned a scowl to his face and snatched the door open.

There was at once absolute quiet. Those who had been caught away from their seats slunk silently back, cowed by the threatening stare Herr Noren hurled at them as he stood drawn up to his full height in the doorway.

Order restored, he again shut the door and turned to Hanna. "Pity," he said slowly. "I had hoped Erland would go on to high school. He has something in him that's worth developing."

Hanna uneasily fingered the fringes of her shawl. "We need to have him earning a little," she replied submissively. "We're poor. It's hard to make ends meet."

"Yah—I see. . . ." Herr Noren again stood thinking. He looked very sorry, not at all stiff and scowling as school masters usually do. "Yah," he at last said, resignedly. He put his hand on the door knob. "I'll see about the examination."

"Thank you," said Hanna with a curtsey, her face brightening. "Thank you very much, Herr Noren."

He had already opened the door to step into the room when something occurred to him and he once more turned to Hanna. "I hope you'll find him some work that's not too hard," he said. "He isn't very strong, as you know. Something in an office, perhaps. . . ."

"Yah, yah," Hanna intercepted quickly. "Oh, yah, Herr Noren. We'll go easy with him."

So now that was done! She felt greatly relieved on her way

home. It would be a wonderful help if Erland began earning some five kronor a week. Five kronor! Ay—that would be twenty a month! That would more than pay for the rent. That would. . . . Oh! Hanna was figuring. One could do such a lot with twenty kronor a month, and after a while Erland would be given a raise, maybe. And perhaps she could see her way to get Peter a new suit of clothes. He needed one badly. Oh, yah, she was figuring, Hanna was; she was making plans on her way home. And sometimes when you buy a suit of clothes you can manage to bargain and get the stuff a few kronor cheaper than expected and then it is like nothing at all to spend a krona or two buying a set of porcelain—for example like the blue-and-white coffee cups she had seen in a store window on Berg Street. And a coffee pot to match would mean but an added fifty öre. Something to have on the table when company came. And then she could save for Christmas and other holidays the fine gilt “bridal china” Peter had given her when they were married twelve years ago.

Little Nils was sitting on the wooden sofa as she arrived home and entered the kitchen. He had bought the five Russian fire-crackers, but before using them, as he had planned for his approaching combat with the wild injuns, he thought he had better show them to mother, for now that they were paid for and all, she would probably let him keep them.

“I have bought these fire-crackers,” he said humbly and held out his small hand with the five treasured explosives.

“Haven’t I told you,” cried Hanna, “never to buy those things?” And contrary to his hopes she snatched the fire-crackers out of his hand and flung them into the oven, not knowing there were a few embers left from the fire she had made before noon.

Little Nils' head drooped sadly, for how would his pioneers now be able to rout freckly Harry's injuns? But a sudden blast from inside the oven wrenched him out of these gloomy thoughts. One of the fire-crackers had exploded! Hanna gave a piercing scream. She was on her way to the sink but stopped dead short and turned dizzily back again. When she was in front of the oven this was shaken anew by the explosion of two crackers that went off simultaneously—like the firing of a real shooting gun, thought little Nils. He was sitting bolt upright on the sofa now, his eyes like a pair of shining coins. Oh, but this was marvelous!

The fourth cracker banged. "Jesus Kristus!" Hanna shrieked. She scurried about like a frightened hen, not knowing what she should do to stop the explosions.

Wonderful! thought little Nils. Wonderful! He was quite moved. This was so real, so very much like war! Oh, God, for a couple of skulking injuns! It would have made this a perfect show!—Bang! There went the fifth one! And again Hanna uttered a loud scream. At last she found the door and fled in desperation into the living-room.

But knowing this was the last cracker little Nils let himself down from the sofa and slipped unobtrusively out of the kitchen.

"Where are you going?" Hanna cried. "Come here! I've something to tell you!"

But little Nils wisely didn't stop to listen. Having pushed his feet into his wooden shoes he glided out of the door and clattered hastily down the stairs.

Hanna was still sitting with her hands on her breast, pale-faced after her fright, when the door bell rang. It was Fru

Svensson upstairs. "Have ye heard th' news, Fru Hammar?" she asked.

"No! What's that?"

"We're going t'have a new landlord. Th' house is sold."

Hanna let her hands sink into her lap. To her face came an expression of wonder and marvelling.—What was it the fortune-teller had said: "There's a change coming in your house."

4

AY! 'Twas meant for little Nils to feel the first impact of this unexpected change; the time when it happened was the noon-hour as the workers were taking their midday meal.

For Nils was playing on the sidewalk outside the tenement house when suddenly he heard someone roar at him, "Stop that, you-u! Whaddarye doin' that for!"

Looking up from the sidewalk, which with nothing but a piece of ordinary chalk he had decorated splendidly with strange designs, Nils saw the scowling face of a bent and crooked workman, evidently a carpenter, judging from the traces of saw-dust and splinters of wood clinging to his patched blue dungarees.

"Whaddarye doin' that for?" the carpenter again crabbed and made a face at Nils.

Nils stood silent with the piece of chalk in his hand, looking alternately at the sidewalk and the man's angry face. The latter he didn't like at all. It was all puckered up and grey and sour with eyes like small pale-blue beads crowded close together over a warped nose. No, little Nils decidedly didn't

like this man. And he thought his question stupid. Why did he chalk the sidewalk? Now, listen to that! Why, of course, because it looked vastly better that way, and besides, what good was a piece of chalk if you couldn't do something with it!

But why, thought little Nils, should he discuss these things with a stranger? "It isn't your sidewalk," he said simply to the carpenter, his voice carrying just a touch of reproach. Upon that he prepared to resume his interrupted labors.

"Ho!—but it is!" the carpenter barked and stooped down and pushed his puckered face close to the face of little Nils.

Nils regarded him in open-mouthed wonder.

"Ho! You-u!—It is!" the carpenter again snorted, unconcealed triumph in his voice, his face wrinkling into an evil grin. "I've bought th' house! It's mine!"

And thus little Nils knew that before him stood the new landlord.

Ay, but of course, this gave a different aspect to the whole situation. And when the victorious carpenter growled, "I tell you, throw th' chalk away!" then Nils judiciously let the stub drop to the ground, the landlord instantly putting his clumsy boot on it and grinding it to dust under his heel. That done, he threatened the downcast Nils with a last parting snarl and betook himself in through the gates.

As the carpenter entered the yard two housewives were there enjoying a good long chat, one of them the wizened Krok-woman, the tale-bearer of the house; the other, Fru Bendel, fleshy, voluminous and easy-going. The latter belonged to the upper stratum of the tenement-house population because of the fact that Herr Bendel was employed as waiter in one of the city's finest hotels and could be seen, even on week-days,

in flying swallow-tails and wing-collar with white bow-tie and starched snow-white shirt-front and everything.

The landlord glared at the two women. He spread his legs and peered sour-facedly about him, inspecting his newly-acquired property. "Hm-m-m!" He cleared his throat loudly and swayed his body and hemmed some more, but no one took any notice of him.

In a lull of their conversation the Krok-woman stepped into the shed where the three wooden garbage tubs were housed. She emptied her pail of refuse and then again emerged, ready to resume her talk with Fru Bendel.

But a bark from the strange carpenter made Fru Krok jump with fright. "You-u!" he yelled. "Close that there door after ye!" He glared angrily at her and shifted his gnarled hands behind his back. He growled deep down in his throat. He put out one foot awkwardly and stiffly cocked his head.

The Krok-woman screwed up her old hawk-like face and stared at him with scathing contempt. "You-u!" she spat. "And now what th' devil have you got t' say about it?"

The man in the ragged carpenter outfit blinked his closely-set eyes. "I've a lot! Ho! Shut up! You-u!" he snorted. His speech sounded as if chopped to pieces with a sharp-edged axe.

"Oh, really . . . ! My cute lil' cock-eyed—! Of all th' blamed-est . . . !" The furious woman approached him a gliding step or two, thrusting out her sharp chin which described an upward curve the reverse of her pointed nose. She wheezed and she spat.

The carpenter gave a defiant rumble. They stood tensely facing each other, their scrawny necks craned forward, eyes

narrowed, both of them spitting and snarling like two big alley cats ready to jump at each other's throat.

The carpenter growled. "You! That door. Why don't ye close it!"

The Krok-woman drew a hissing breath. "Aw—close yer blessed gab!" she crowed and eyed her adversary venomously, a hectic flush creeping to the wrinkled skin of her cheek bones.

"Shut up!" he roared. "I tell ye! Shut up!"

A window was suddenly flung open in the second story and a housewife eagerly stuck out her head, wide-eyedly gobbling in the scene below and cocking her ear to the jarring voices. The carpenter lost his temper completely. He raved and brandished his arms in the air and jumped and stamped his clumsy boots on the cobblestone pavement, the spitting Krok-woman circling guardedly about him, her face flushed and tense, eyes glistening like two small, live coals.

Another window burst open. A third. A fourth. Heads and shoulders out of the windows, the tenants were elbowing each other, guffawing and commenting on the free show staged down in the yard. Fat and timid Fru Bendel had withdrawn into her stairway from which safe retreat she watched the Krok-woman trying for a chance to fly at the throat of the maddened carpenter.

"Give it to him, Fru Krok!" some banterer shouted from one of the windows. "Give it to him good an' plenty!"

The flush deepened on the Krok-woman's cheeks.

"That's right! That's right!" several voices cried as, encouraged by their support, she made another attempt to jump and sink her claws in the reddened throat of her opponent.

The yard echoed with shouts and gibes and gales of laughter.

A handful of children were attracted by the noise and scurried into the yard from the street and stood absorbedly watching the scuffle.

"I'll give it t'ye!" the Krok-woman hissed. "I'll give it t'ye, ye cock-eyed stiff! I'll pull yer crooked nose outta yer dirty face!"

The carpenter retreated a step, warding off the aggressive Fru Krok who was now playing to the gallery and vastly overdoing her part.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Stop!" He ducked and retreated again. And like the Stadium's tribute to a favored gladiator, a many-throated roar thundered from the crowded windows, hailing the Krok-woman.

"Stop!" the carpenter gasped again, despairing as he beheld Victory turning her face Krok-wards. "Stop!" he panted. "I—I—I'm th' new landlord!—Stop!"

Fru Krok emitted a sort of hiccupping gasp and sank limply back, her jaw dropping. A running whisper ran zigzagging from window to window. Heads were hurriedly withdrawn, the windows banged shut and curtains drawn to leave only a crack for peep hole.

The carpenter had called upon his reserves. And lo! he had repulsed the enemy. The Krok-woman was steadily falling back. She glanced helplessly about her for succor but where now were those who had goaded her on?

"You-u!" the carpenter barked, his courage returning. "Ye're too fresh! Ye're too fresh!" That seemed all he could think of to say.

But even that little was unnecessary, for the Krok-woman wilted and shrank until she seemed about to dissolve into her ragged black skirt and many trailing petticoats. Her red-

rimmed eyelids blinked rapidly. She put a twisted forefinger on her colorless lower lip, trying to coax forth words, but she remained utterly speechless. She made an heroic effort at a smirking smile but it froze at the merest thought of what might happen to her now—back with the rent and all!

Presently the carpenter gave a start and snatched a watch from under his working blouse. Flicking open the protecting nickel cover, he glanced at the watch and gave another jump. He shoved the watch back into his pocket, turned abruptly from the blinking Krok-woman and hobbled out of the yard, his boots clattering on the uneven cobblestones and his body awkwardly swaying sideways in his effort to hurry. Muttering crossly to himself he pushed through the crowd of gaping children and rushed out through the gates.

After he had left, the windows again opened, cautiously, one by one. A head peeped out. "Has he gone, Fru Krok?"

The Krok-woman nodded sadly as she stood there, Victory's laurel turned to thorns.

The windows were now all pushed open. "I know th' bastard!" a raw-boned carpenter on the first floor shouted his information to the other tenants. "He's a goddamn stingy miser. He's saved every damn penny he ever earned in his life an' now he's got enough t'buy this here house."

"Ay ay! So that's what he is!"

"But why the hell was he running off the way he did?" someone shouted to carpenter Fridman.

"Why? He was scared he wouldn't be back to his job in time. He's working over at th' new construction in Möllevång Square. 'Fraid he would get fired, th' jackass!"

5

YAH, yah, the days pass in due order, one by one. And now Easter would soon be here. "Mother has promised me three Easter-eggs," said Britta, trying to tease little Nils. "I'm going to have one blue and one red and one yellow."

So Nils ran to Hanna and asked whether he wouldn't get three eggs too.

"Yah," said Hanna wearily, down on hands and knees, scrubbing the floor. "But Lord Creator! I beg you, Nils—do keep out of my way for five minutes, will you, so I can get this house cleaned up!"

"I will," said Nils. Then he went, looking very thoughtful. He turned round in the doorway and looked back at his mother. "Can I have one blue and one red and one green?" he asked politely.

Hanna gave a despairing moan.

"Just tell me," said little Nils. "And then I won't bother you any more. Can I?"

"YAH!—!" Hanna cried.

"Because," Nils said in parting, "Britta told me she's going

to have one blue and one red and one yellow. I don't like yellow, so I'll take a green one instead." Then he went out and slammed the door and skipped merrily down the stairs, his wooden shoes making an infernal racket on the cement steps. But Hanna gritted her teeth and pressed her soap-sudded hands to her forehead.

Oh, yah, there was holiday feeling in the air already, with a sky most appropriately solemn and grey as if it were preparing itself for the approaching Easter.

And at school the flurried boys were plunged into an abyss of gloom as they sat fidgeting on their seats while Herr Noren behind his black-topped desk hurled at them a volley of questions pertaining to the Thirty Years' war.

"You, William!" he demanded, levelling his long bony forefinger at one of his pupils. "When did the Thirty Years' War begin?"

The twelve-year-old, chubby-faced William rose reluctantly, the desk top clattering. He differed from most of the boys in that his straw-colored hair had been plastered down with water and his now flushing face had been thoroughly washed. Donned in his Sunday clothes he stood stiffly and manifestly ill at ease in a freshly-laundered white blouse too tight at his throat. With his flustered expression and the clumsy red necktie squeezing his Adam's apple, William gave the impression of having narrowly escaped a strangler.

When did the Thirty Years' War begin? William's troubled face took on a look of earnest concentration and he puckered his brow and moved his lips in evidence of his whole-hearted willingness to reply. But no sound was forthcoming. He stared unhappily out of the window, squirming under Herr Noren's inquisitorial glare. He gulped and he moistened his lips. An

invisible hand seemed to pull the flame-colored tie still tighter around his tortured neck, letting all the blood enter his head but none get away.

Herr Noren frowned and ominously cleared his throat while round-about William a dozen arms waved frantically, the boys impatiently flinging themselves headlong forward across the desks in an effort to gain the teacher's attention. "I! I!" they were ready to shout. "Please! I know! I know!" And their grinning faces flicked malicious leers at the choking William who had flunked on such a simple question. Gee, it was a cinch!

"Quiet!" Herr Noren growled and rapped a silencing warning on the desk top whereupon his finger shot out like a threatening gun. "You, Anders!" he summoned another boy.

Anders scampered gladly to his feet. "1630!" he sang out cheerfully, then stood airily waiting for the teacher's approving nod to sit down.

But something in Herr Noren's stony countenance froze Anders' self-complacent grin. Moses! And now what was wrong? He stole a surreptitious glance at the other boys who were almost jerking their arms off! He blinked in bewilderment and tried to collect himself and think of the Thirty Years' War but got unnerved by all this hand-waving and noise and felt his mind beginning to spin like a carousel.

Two boys were now standing: William, who appeared somewhat comforted by having a companion to share his disgrace, and the otherwise cocky Anders who looked more and more foolish. Herr Noren surveyed darkly the many grinning faces, his fingers drumming the desk top. "You, Erland!" he snapped, challenging-like.

Erland slowly got to his feet and stood silent, his gaze humbly lowered onto the desk. For he had no answer and had not even raised his hand. Like William he was water-combed and rigid in his Sunday-best.

"Erland!" Herr Noren sadly reproached him. "The dreamer! The poet! . . ."

Erland wriggled nervously and his ears turned pink. He put one hand behind his back and furtively clenched his fist because some of the fellows in the next row were sniggering.

Herr Noren sighed. "And you—And you!" He staged a veritable holdup as with repeated gestures of his long finger he picked out the ones who tried to make themselves inconspicuous in their seats. But at his summons they rose, one after the other, and stood with their heads drooping, like so many offenders arranged before a severe tribunal.

Herr Noren observed them scornfully. "Has anyone of you ever glanced into your history book?" he frowned.

A few of the boys coughed timidly and shuffled their feet as a sign that they had.

Herr Noren did not seem to believe them. His fingers beat a martial tempo on the black-topped desk as he transferred his disgusted gaze to one of the still waving boys. "You, Hilding," he growled tentatively, as if no longer expecting a correct answer to his question about the opening date of the Thirty Years' War.

"1618!" Hilding blurted out in a victorious tone. And at this the other boys unitedly dropped their arms and sank back onto their seats and relaxed.

Herr Noren nodded. "And what happened in 1630?"

"Gustavus Adolphus took part in the war," Hilding declaimed with the ease of one certain of being beyond error.

"Right," said Herr Noren and eyed Hilding favorably. "Can you also tell me what started the war?"

But now Hilding stiffened. For he was only clever at straight plain dates which you could commit to memory and be sure of. Hair-splitting *hows* and *whys* he had no use for at all. Bewilderment spread over his face.

The teacher nodded to a pupil in the front row, a pale-faced and neatly-dressed boy. "Helge!" said Herr Noren, giving his voice a most friendly inflection.

Helge rose and replied quietly that, "The Bohemian Protestants were oppressed by the Emperor Mathias."

"Correct. And then what did they do?"

"They decided to make themselves independent of the Hapsburgs and so they set up a king of their own."

"Aha, yah." Herr Noren nodded, his countenance softening. "And whom did they choose for king?"

"Frederick, the elector of the Palatinate," said Helge modestly. "He was called the 'Winter-king' because he ruled only one winter."

"Thank you, Helge," said Herr Noren. "You may sit down." He leaned back in his chair, quizzically studying the line-up of boys. But they received his scorn as apathetically as they had listened to Helge, to whose perfection they were accustomed. For he always gave answers of this sort. He was a freak, a living book, so they long ago had agreed. He knew everything. His parents were dead and he lived with an old white-haired aunt in a fine house where the shades were perpetually drawn so that the rooms were dark. And along the walls were shelves with hundreds of books. There was a legend that Helge had read them all.

On Herr Noren's gesture the boys dropped to their seats.

Only William and Anders were still standing. Herr Noren turned to the latter. "Now, then?" he asked, "When did the Thirty Years' War begin?"

"1618," Anders replied soberly as behooves one who is merely echoing another.

"And what happened in 1630?"

"Gustavus Adolphus took part in the war," said Anders. Then on a sign from Herr Noren he sat down quietly.

"Yah-ha. That's that." The teacher swerved round on the chair and faced the unhappy William. "Perhaps you now can tell us when the Thirty Years' War began?" he mockingly asked.

"1618," said William and gulped. He had difficulty with his Adam's apple on account of the strangling tie. But on seeing Herr Noren about to frame another question he made ready to let fly from his lips the statement that "Gustavus Adolphus took part in the war," and so it came as a shock to him when he instead was called upon to explain the cause of the war.

"The . . . the Protestants . . ." William stammered. He seemed to be in great distress, his face was as red as his fiery tie. He stared hard at the gloomy sky outside.

"Go on!" Herr Noren prompted. "Didn't you pay attention a moment ago when Helge told us about it?"

William glanced at him nervously, then again turned to stare at the sky which remained blank as his own bewildered mind. Herr Noren gave him ample time to collect himself, but William saw no light.

"Sit down, William," said the teacher at last, not unkindly. And William flopped thankfully to his seat.

Herr Noren now sat plunged in thought for some minutes.

Then he bestirred himself and looked at his watch on the desk. "Which of you are going for the examination?" he asked.

Five boys rose: the unhappy William, Erland and three others, all of them awkward in ill-fitting Sunday clothes, apprehensive and nervous in view of the impending examination.

Herr Noren studied each of them in turn, the boys self-consciously dropping their eyes. Hans, the bully of the school, a big lout popularly known as the Terror, was today meek as a lamb.

"You'll have to leave in a few minutes," said Herr Noren in an uncommonly soft voice. "You know your way, don't you? The Rörsjö School, on the third floor, room thirty-two. You are to be there at two o'clock."

He sat absently fingering his watch. Then he spoke again. "Have you all got jobs? You, William, what are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna work in a shop," William said firmly, knowing that for once he was right.

"What kind of shop?" asked the teacher kindly, having dropped his usual curt manner.

"Where they make boxes," William mumbled.

"I see. Are you glad to be quitting school?"

William swallowed and stared stonily down his flaming tie.

"And you, Hans?" Herr Noren turned to the Terror who seemed much too large for his desk.

Hans muttered something inaudible and picked sulkily at his nails.

"I didn't hear," said Herr Noren. "What did you say you were going to do?"

"I ain't got no job," Hans replied defiantly, raising his voice, his face flushing as the class sniggered.

"Oh!" said the teacher. "Hm—. And you, Erland?"

"I don't know. . . . Haven't got anything yet."

Herr Noren regarded the five boys gravely. Then he rose slowly and stepped out on the floor. "Yah, you'll have to go now," he said.

The boys scrambled out of their seats and trooped over to where Herr Noren stood ready to say good-bye to them. He took each of them by the hand. "So long, William. Good luck to you. Let me know how you're making out." He patted the boy's shoulder.

" . . . And you, Erland. Thanks for all the nice poetry you've recited for us. I hope you'll come to our evening school. Good luck. . . . So long, Hans. I hope you'll get a good job. Come and see me some time. All of you. If you have any trouble or if there's anything you want to ask me about, I'll be glad to do what I can for you."

They were now at the door which Herr Noren opened for them, and they stepped out into the corridor. "Good-bye, boys, and good luck," the teacher said once more, and stood looking after them as they clattered toward the stairway.

Then he closed the door softly and went back to his desk. He sat for a long time silent, turning a pencil thoughtfully between his fingers. Presently he put the pencil away. He seemed much concerned about placing it in a line parallel with a pile of copy books. He raised his head and looked out over the class. "Open your history books," he said slowly.

6

SO NOW the boys were on their way to the special examination. They trotted on silently, each of them plunged in his own thoughts, deep gloom on their young faces.

William forced a finger between his neck and the tight shirt collar in a futile effort to ease the pressure on his Adam's apple. Now suppose they'd quiz him on the Thirty Years' War! His lip quivered. Well, at least he knew when it started. It was—it was—now, let's see—it was sixteen hundred and —what? Sixteen hundred and—and thirty, wasn't it?

"Say, fellers," he appealed, pathetically. "'Twas sixteen thirty the Thirty Years' War started, wasn't it?"

They all halted and puckered their brows in profound concentration. "I think 'twas sixteen eighteen," Erland ventured uncertainly. The others sighed and distractedly shook their heads. They weren't sure. And even so—they had their own personal problems.

They started off again, reluctantly dragging their feet. Emil, a pale, thin boy, was tormenting himself with the fear that he might be quizzed on geography. He always got utterly

confused when the teacher asked him over to the map to point out a city or to trace the boundary line of a province or a country or something. Standing thus close to the huge map all the criss-cross crooked and worming red and black lines and dots and shaded and colored areas bewildered him. And some of those lines were railroads and others were rivers—there seemed to be no system at all. Emil was even more pale than usual. He felt clammy-handed and hot. He knew he would be sunk if they questioned him on geography.

The five boys shambled morosely along in the grey afternoon: William with the red tie, the pale-faced Emil, Erland and the two others. They all seemed puny beside the hulking Terror with whom they had struggled bitterly in the past. But the impending examination had rendered him harmless; anxiety was written on his sulky face.

They all stiffened up as they approached the school house. "Jesus! I wish it was over!" William groaned and stared miserably at the prison-like building with its row upon row of glaring windows.

Erland made a last desperate attempt to clear up some confusing points of grammar. He never could get those transitive and intransitive verbs straight. Suppose you say, *The farmer whips the horse.* Here *whips* is clearly transitive because the action is transferred to the horse. And if you say, *I read the verb read* is, of course, intransitive because there is no receiver of the act. But if you say, *I read the book.* Is *read* transitive or intransitive? Does the book receive the reading or doesn't it? Erland felt a rush of hot perspiration along his back. He felt utterly depressed. Suppose they asked him about this! He would never pass the examination! Never!

As the boys neared the gates their pace gradually slackened.

Finally they came to a full stop and glanced timidly up at the windows which seemed to stare back at them harshly. The boys swallowed and looked helplessly at each other, then moved unwillingly through the gates and advanced slowly across the gravel yard that crunched solemnly under their boots.

They climbed the great granite stairs in dead silence and shuffled across the landing, through the tall entrance, into the building, the hollow echo of their footsteps drawing away into the gloom of the empty corridor.

Half an hour later they came out again, carrying their diplomas in their hands. Wonder was stamped on their faces. For they had all passed the examination: William, the Terror, the whole five-man-strong bunch of them!

But they said no word until they were well outside the gates. Then they stopped. "Jesus! I passed!" William gasped and unbuttoned his blouse at the throat.

The Terror chuckled. He poked his grubby fist playfully into William's ribs. "Me, too!" he grinned and threw a half-incredulous glance over his shoulder at the severe school house, as if he had come to doubt the judgment of the master-minds heading that loathed institution. He chuckled again. "Let's get goin'," he grunted. "God's sake, let's get outta here, fellers!"

So they drew off, chattering about the questions they had been asked and which, to their never-ending amazement, they somehow seemed to have answered correctly. They shambled along. Their drying hair rose rebelliously against the restraining effects of water-combing. They grew cocky again and came gradually back into their own. "You fellers

got any money?" the Terror asked. "I've fifteen öre myself. Chip in ten more an' we can get a packet o' smokes."

They dug into their pockets and found enough to make twenty-five öre. Erland felt he wasn't particularly wanted, and so he dropped a little behind, and no one seemed either to care or notice.

Emil, with the pale face and the long scrawny neck, also segregated himself from the rest. "Yah, so long," he said. Something solemn had been added to his stiff bearing, only it didn't quite harmonize with his short, funny-looking pants. "I've gotta hurry," he apologized. "I'm gonna look for a job before they close at five." But the others didn't pay any attention.

When the three remaining boys stopped at a cigar store Erland sidled off and crossed the street. He lingered on the opposite sidewalk for a moment and watched the others lighting their cigarettes and puffing away importantly. He saw William loosen his red tie and chuck it into his pocket. The Terror took off his shoes, tied the laces together and slung the boots across his shoulder.

Erland went on his way home. He felt very strange to be walking here like this while all the others were still at school. He thought gratefully of the teacher who had thanked him for reciting poetry. He felt a sudden void within him, and his future seemed like a great empty chasm that had to be laboriously filled. He trotted on in the grey afternoon. When he reached home Britta and little Nils were playing with the other children in the yard. They gave him the key. Mother was out working and would be home around seven o'clock. She had said he could heat the coffee. They would have supper when she got home.

He went upstairs and entered the kitchen, took off his cap and sat down on the sofa and read his diploma. He read it twice, then he folded it up carefully and put it on the table and sat thinking, unaware of the spurts of noise cascading up from back-yard and street.

7

NEXT day he was entirely free, with no homework or school or anything. He spent the forenoon making up a play, and then he and some other children helped to build a tent where they intended to put on the show. He was busy instructing the "actors" when his mother was heard, calling him from the window. "Come up, Erland! I've something to tell you!"

"Ach!" he muttered impatiently, "if they would only leave you alone! Wait," he said to his actors. "I'll be back in a minute." He ran upstairs, taking three stairs at a stride so as to get back again quickly to his waiting troupe.

As soon as he stepped inside the door he felt a tightening at his throat. For on a chair sat a strange woman, a little, quiet mouse-like woman in black. She looked very kindly at Erland as he entered, but he felt certain she did not bring any good.

His mother turned to the visitor. "Yah, Fru Pfeiffer, this is him. Do you think he'll do?"

Fru Pfeiffer nodded. Her tiny blue-veined hands lay still in her lap. She smiled quietly at Erland.

But he didn't smile back. Do what? What would he do for? He didn't have to wonder long. He hated the sweet smile on his mother's face when she told him: "Fru Pfeiffer has a job for you, Erland."

He did not reply. He stood silent, listening to the shouts and laughter from the yard.

"Now bow," prompted his mother, "and say, 'thank you,' to the lady."

He bowed and said, "Thank you." Then he stood stiffly, again listening to the voices that floated in on the warm summer wind through the open window.

"When would you like him to start?" Hanna asked Fru Pfeiffer.

"Any time. He could come mit me now maybe?" She spoke with a strong German accent.

"Yah. That would be fine. Then he'll know how to get there.—Erland! What are you dreaming about? Hurry up now and wash your face! You'll go with the lady and start right in."

A few minutes later Erland and the little mouse-like woman walked down the stairs. His throat felt lumpy and thick. The other children were inside the tent as he followed Fru Pfeiffer across the yard. No one saw him. At the gate he turned around once before he stepped out into the street. He took one long look at the tent under the tree, then he turned away. He knew that something in his life had come to a close and that something new was about to begin. He glanced furtively at the little black woman. What would it be?

"How old are you?" she asked as they were walking up the street.

"Eleven and a half," he replied in a small voice.

No more was said. After about twenty minutes they reached

an old dilapidated house that from without seemed entirely deserted. They climbed a vast old wooden stairway. Fru Pfeiffer lifted the latch of a door and they entered into a barn-like place that was murky and dusty and had the appearance of a factory of some sort. A sweet smell hung in the air. Erland noticed a number of glass jars filled with candy.

"Wait," Fru Pfeiffer whispered cautiously and slipped through a door leading to a smaller room. She remained there for a minute then moused out again and stood back, her hands folded in front, a cowed look on her face.

A rumble was heard from inside the room. There was a growl and an angry roar. Then a mountain of a man loomed in the door opening.

Erland took a step back and stared at the man who was all great humps of muscle. His hairy fists were enormous. He was unshaven, his hair tousled, his face puffed and cruel. And he was half drunk.

Erland cast a quick glance at small Fru Pfeiffer; suddenly he took comfort in her presence. He saw the man approaching, huge, terrifying and smelling of whisky. His shirt was open in front, showing an amazing expanse of hairy chest.

He glowered at Erland. "*Ist dies der Knabe—heh?*" he rumbled, turning to his timid wife.

"*Ja, ja, Hermann,*" she whispered, nervously clasping her hands.

Again Pfeiffer focussed his bloodshot eyes upon the shrinking boy. He bored into him a protracted stare. Suddenly he flung out his arm and indicated a work table near the window. Fru Pfeiffer glided up with a stool. She motioned Erland to sit down, which he did, stiff with fright.

The gigantic man bulked over him. He emptied a box of

almond-shaped candy on the table. Fru Pfeiffer supplied a packet of rectangular tissue paper.

"Now *dies way, verstehe!*" said Pfeiffer, snatching up a paper with his left hand and with his right a piece of candy which he rolled into the paper with a deft movement of the flat of his hand. Then with another expert touch he gave a twist to the protruding ends of the paper and threw the wrapped-up candy into a big wooden box.

"Let me see, now!" he said with a gesture at the candy.

Erland picked up a candy and a paper and tried to imitate the man's way of wrapping. He didn't think he succeeded very well, but with a grunt Pfeiffer left him, and busied himself with the contents of a big iron pot.

Presently Pfeiffer roared something in German to his wife. She answered in a timid, hardly audible voice.

"*Was sagst du?*" the man bellowed, his face flushing with anger. "*Donnerwetter! Du bist ja eine verdamte Blödsinnige! Habe ich nicht gesagt dass du es zu Hause bringen sollst.*"

"*Ja, ja, ich wollte, Hermann. Ich wollte,*" she pleaded. "*Ich wollte es Morgen holen.*"

"*Ja—Morgen! Morgen!*" Pfeiffer growled, snatching from a stool a long wooden stick with which he stirred the contents of the pot.

After a while he hulked up to where Erland sat, putting his hairy fist on the table and watching the boy work. Apparently he was satisfied. "*Ja, ja!*" he grumbled. He noisily took his huge bulk away and retired into the small room, the floor planks creaking under him as he went.

8

HOW did you like it?" Hanna asked Erland that evening.

"Like—?" He kept a sullen silence. He almost felt his mother had betrayed him.

But Peter was enthusiastic. "Think of it!" he exclaimed on hearing it was Hermann Pfeiffer Erland was working for. "Why, he's the smartest candy maker in this country! The Mazetti factories have offered him big money but he won't work for them. He knows secrets about candy making no one can find out."

Hanna changed the conversation. She showed Peter a letter. "From the tax collector," she said. She looked worried. "Says he wants the money now. He won't wait any longer."

Peter read the letter and grew very quiet. He ate his supper in silence.

"Good God, the way they're after poor people!" Hanna said bitterly. "Couldn't he be a little lenient when we always have paid regularly?"

"Yah-ah." Peter sighed. He had worked overtime all winter

until late at night and still it was almost impossible to make things square up.

"Huh! I'll go and speak to him!" Hanna presently snapped. "I'll give him a piece of my mind!" she added, her gall rising. "Treating people like they weren't human beings! See what they did to the Svenssons last year. Came and took all their furniture! Now, is that civilization? Took everything they had except their bed. And poor Svensson sick and everything. A rotten world is what I call it! There's no justice! I'll go and speak to him this very minute!"

She stepped to the mirror and snatched the pins out of her long auburn hair, letting it fall in a shower about her. She shook it out with a furious toss of her head and ran a comb a few times through the rippling flow, then seized it with both hands and twisted the whole mass into a coil. She stuck the hair pins back again. Now there! She flung a shawl around her shoulders. "I'll be back soon," she said to the gloomy-looking Peter. "Good-bye."

She worked up her temper on the way to the collector. At the house she stopped outside the door for a moment and caught her breath. Then she knocked.

"Good evening," she said as she entered. She had a smile on her face now, for she believed in courtesy. "Good evening, Herr Collector. How are you? I'm Fru Hammar—from Flint Street, you remember."

"Good evening," said the collector. "Yah, I know. We sent you a letter, didn't we?" He took a cigar from his mouth, his grumpy face breaking into a grin. He was a big fleshy-faced man, a little greasy. "Well, how are things?" he asked. "Sit down, Fru Hammar."

"No, thanks. I would rather stand. Now about this last

instalment. You'll be kind and wait a few weeks, won't you? You know times are hard and the children are needing clothes and shoes and everything."

The collector chewed his cigar. He pondered, then doubtfully shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't do that," he said, looking up. But there was a twinkle in his eye.

"You can't!" Hanna snapped, having missed the twinkle. "So you mean you'll come and get our furniture, do you? Now, Herr Collector, listen to me! We're honest people. We're working hard. We're keeping out of debt. My husband has been working till eleven o'clock every night all this winter just to pay this tax. And I haven't been lazy myself if you don't mind my telling you. And now you say you're coming to take our furniture. In faith! Then—come! . . ."

The collector raised his hand and tried to put in a word. But Hanna didn't heed. She was talking now. She stood there before him in all her wrath—straight that back no toil could defeat, flashing those eyes no midnight hours of sewing and mending seemed ever able to dim, her work-roughened yet small, sinewy hand clenched on the collector's desk.

"You come!" she invited him again, her voice indignant, but not loud, not shrill. "Come, Herr Collector! Come and take the things we've slaved for and paid for. Take them like you robbed the Svenssons of theirs, and the Anderssons, too, for that matter, the year before last. You come and I'll be there to meet you!"

She had spoken. She banged her fist on his desk so that the inkwell jumped. She looked him straight in the eye, unblinking.

He was sitting slumped back on the chair, staring at her in amazement. "Jesus!" he said. "And you didn't curse even

once!" He leaned forward and started to drum his thick fingers on the desk. He was angry now. He chewed his cigar. "Damn it!" he barked. "What do you mean—bawling me out like that! I could have you arrested, I could!"

"You better get a good strong cop," she snapped, snatching her shawl tightly about her.

The collector broke into a roaring laugh. He knocked the ashes off his cigar, spilling them on the floor, then he again shoved the black stick into the corner of his mouth. "By God, I think you'd hold your own!" he growled. "What a woman! Well, let's be friends, Fru Hammar. I'm not a bad sport myself. I'll wait till the end of the month. That's all I can do for you. You know I'm not keeping the money. For Christ's sake, I'm only collecting it! I've to report and have my books clear. Don't you understand?"

"Yah, yah. Of course—" Hanna looked worried. Her defiance was gone. "To the end of the month! . . ." She shook her head. "I don't see how we can. . . ."

"Sorry, that's the most I can do."

"Hm. Yah . . . I see. Thank you. I hope you don't mind—you know. I didn't mean to be rude. . . ."

"Not at all." He offered his big hand. "Here, Fru Hammar. No bad feeling. I admire your pluck."

"Thank you. Good-bye." She went. And when she got back home she sat down with a stubby pencil and made calculations on a brown paper bag. She sighed and she shook her head and tried it again but there just wouldn't be enough for the tax.

"If we only could tide over this time," she said to Peter. "Now when Erland's working we might be able to manage a little easier."

"Pfeiffer didn't say anything about how much you would get, did he?" she turned to Erland.

"No—o," he replied, lingering on the word. He had spent the evening making up his mind to tell his mother he didn't want to go back to Pfeiffer's again.

"Yah—work hard and be industrious," said Hanna. "Your money will be of good help."

9

NOW—speaking about fortune-telling! Didn't a letter come from across the water, after all! It was lying on the table when Hanna returned home from work in the evening.

She had been away all day doing the family wash for Fru Nyman whose husband was foreman in the machine shop of the State Railroads. Ay, there was no one Hanna liked to work for so much as these folk. Herr Nyman had been poor himself once but had not forgotten it like a lot of people do when they rise in the world, getting swell-headed and cocky and putting on all kinds of airs. Oh, no, both husband and wife were friendly and kind. Herr Nyman had worked himself up to his present position from a lowly start as stoker and, later on, engineer. He was a tall, powerful man with a frank open face and a voice full of booming friendliness.

Oh, but he coddled and spoiled his wife! "Well, how's my poor little sickly woman?" his cheerful voice would ring out when he came home from the shop in the evening. And he crushed her to his mighty breast and petted her and played

with her and the children and mussed their hair all up. Ay, he was a husband, a father and a man!

And, of course, Fru Nyman wasn't a sickly little woman at all. She was just the nicest and kindest and sunniest little house-fru any man could wish for his wife. Only, perhaps, she was a little bit too soft, sheltered and coddled as she had always been. "I know so little about the world," she confided to Hanna while the latter was drinking her afternoon coffee and resting a few minutes from her labors in the Nyman's wash-house. "I know almost nothing. I was only eighteen when Nyman came and we were married, and I had hardly been outside my home before then. Oh, my father was such a grand kind man also! And my mother so nice and sweet!" Ay, Hanna could well believe that. Anyone looking at Fru Nyman might see at a glance that she came from nice good people.

"And now I have this," said Fru Nyman dreamily, looking about her in her beautiful apartment with the many bright windows through which the sun poured in. And there were color, brightness and cheer in the rooms too, with lovely hangings and rugs and all. *Live and let live* was Herr Nyman's motto. "He wants me and the children to have everything of the best," Fru Nyman murmured. "He says we can begin putting money in the bank later on—when he gets even more pay than he does now. He says now we're young and shall enjoy life while we may. He hates all sorts of miserliness. He's so kind and thoughtful, you'd never believe it."

"Oh, yah!" Hanna nodded. Wasn't it Herr Nyman himself who not long ago had bundled together a whole lot of things, clothes and everything, for her to take home and make over for herself and the children? And there was the nicest little

sailor suit which Nyman's boy Sture, had outgrown and it fitted little Nils to perfection.

"Take some more coffee, Fru Hammar," says Fru Nyman. "And you don't mind if I add a drop of this?" She fingers a small bottle with something strong-looking in it. "Gustav told me I shouldn't forget."

"Hm—no. . . ." Hanna, embarrassed, folds and unfolds her chapped red hands. "No—hm-m-m. I wouldn't say no. But just a wee bit, of course. Thanks! THANKS! Oh, but you give me too much, Fru Nyman! I won't be able to scrub the clothes after this!" She gives a little snug laugh and scrunches down comfortably in the chair. Fru Nyman laughs softly too.

"Aren't you going to have a drop also, Fru Nyman?" Hanna asks concernedly.

"Oh, I couldn't! If I only take one single drop it goes right to my head and I get dizzy."

"I see.—Yah." Hanna nods. She understands.

Ay, they were a nice happy pair, foreman Nyman and his wife! Hanna thought of them in the evening as she hurried along the darkening streets, trying to get home in time to have supper ready for Peter before he returned from his work. They were a kind fine pair, they were, and Hanna made a little prayer for them, asking God to be with them all their days and protect both them and their two sweet little children, the boy and the girl.

And then when she got home there was a letter on the table!

Hanna saw at once that the stamps were American. She reached for the letter with a trembling hand while through

her mind ran the words of the fortune-teller. "There's a letter coming from across the water."

She tore the envelope open and pulled out the letter. She glanced at the page and gave a start. A strange handwriting! Then it couldn't be from her brother Bertil! Hurriedly she took in the lines.—"Merciful God!" She gave a piercing cry and her face turned ashen. She dropped the letter to the floor and pressed both of her clenched hands to her temples, staring wildly before her. "Jesus Kristus! Oh, merciful God!—Bertil! Bertil!" She sank down on a chair and buried her face in her hands; she wept with unrestrained abandon, her body wrenched with her sobbing. "Bertil! Bertil! My poor little brother! . . . Oh, God! God! Why did you let this happen? . . . Why! Why! . . ."

"Mother! What is it? What has happened?" Erland asked. He picked up the letter from the floor and glanced down the page, then started to read. As he did so his face grew pale and his eyes became large and dark. "Uncle Bertil has had his arm blown off in an explosion," he said quietly, turning to Vanda.

Little dreamy-eyed, seven-year-old Vanda uttered a pained cry.

Erland nodded sadly as he read on. "Yah, his left arm . . . but they think maybe they can fix it. . . . And three fingers on his right hand shot off . . . and he was hurt badly in the face. . . ."

Hanna was rocking her body from side to side, her face wet with hot-flowing tears. "Bertil! Bertil!" she whispered with infinite tenderness as if her young brother had been there with her and she was trying to console him for his irreparable loss. "My poor little brother! Oh, God! . . ."

And Vanda too was sobbing bitterly—little soft-hearted

Vanda who couldn't bear to see the lowliest of living things hurt. Little Vanda with her sweet face framed by a curling flow of sun-colored hair, her lips always slightly parted and her blue eyes in sad wonder looking out upon a world which forever brought within the walls of her home proof of cruelty and harshness. Little Vanda wept despairingly over her uncle Bertil who had been maimed and dreadfully hurt far away in a foreign land.

Britta and Marta were also in the kitchen, for it was in the evening and they were all gathered for supper. Marta, who was nine, the eldest of the girls, wept quietly, her face turned to the wall. But Britta got an attack of spasmodic jerks in her arms. "Huh!" she sniffed angrily and stared stonily into the wall. "Huh!" Her arms jerked out every which way.

While Hanna and the girls were thus filling the small gas-lit kitchen with their crying, Erland read on. Uncle Bertil had been maimed in a silver mine. There had been an accident. An explosion. Several men had been killed. Uncle Bertil was now in a hospital.

Suddenly Hanna sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing through her dimming tears. She snatched the letter from Erland's hand. "America! America!" she cried. "What are they doing to people over there! Some go and are never heard from again! Others are maimed and destroyed! Promise me, Erland," she turned to the boy, "that you'll never set your foot in that cursed country! Promise me that! Say that you won't leave like they all do when they grow up!"

"Yah," he mumbled. He had stepped to the open window and was now looking out into the half-light of the summer evening. The great beech tree rustled and murmured. Sometimes when the wind came rushing through the boughs it

sounded as if the old tree were heaving a deep sigh. A sparrow gave a short anxious cheep somewhere among the dark masses of foliage.

—A silver mine. Black night hovering over a gaping mine shaft. Machinery humming. Taut wires speeding up and down. Elevators plunging into the pit with the night shift of workers.

Suddenly a blast! A roar! Thunder cracking the ground! Fire! Red flames! Crashing rocks!

Then silence.

Then up in the night shrieks and screams from people running crazily about. The stillness of the night rent with commanding signals of shrill whistles as rescue squads are hurled into action.

But down there silence.

Up on the ground anxious, breathless waiting. . . .

Silence. . . .

Now cables rattling. An elevator rising to the ground. The maimed and wounded and dead brought up from the pit in the glare of blinding electric lights. Laid out on stretchers they lie immovable, white-faced, blood-stained.

—A silver mine! A yawning black hole in the ground. White searchlights searing the night. Men going down and blasting the rock. Hazarding their lives. Working and doing big things—in America—on the other side of the seas. . . .

Hanna is sobbing. Vanda weeps forlornly. Vanda sees no pictures as Erland does. She only feels uncle Bertil's terrible hurt.

Presently little Nils edges up to Erland where the latter is still standing by the open window, looking with wide, dark eyes out into the murmuring night. Until now Nils has been

but a wondering listener. "Erland," he whispers, nudging big brother, "did he get all blown up?"

"Almost," Erland replies, sadly.

Nils peers silently over the edge of the sink into the shadow of the rustling tree out in the yard. "Gee!" he exclaims under his breath. "Think of that!"

He nudges Erland again. "Is it very far to America—huh—say?"

"Yah," big brother replies impatiently. "Keep quiet, will you."

Little Nils draws a deep sigh and stands plunged in meditation. His fair hair looks very wicked and mussed. "Just tell me," he whispers after a while. "Erland—how much does it cost to go there?"

"Sh-h-h-h!"

The faucet is dripping. Singly and with hard tapping sounds the drops in long intervals hit the cast-iron sink—clop . . . clop . . . clop . . .

Hanna and the girls are weeping.

10

PFEIFFER got drunk almost every day. He rumbled and he cursed, his elephantine mass hulking about in the half-gloom of the shop. Now he stooped over some pot or other to stir its contents, then again emerged out of a dusty corner, his clenched fist threatening his diminutive wife.

A constant visitor in the shop was the blanched-faced Heinrich Retzel, his rust-colored hair drooping limply and flip-flapping about his watery eyes. He was always following Pfeiffer about in the shop, chatting, exhorting, gesticulating. They got into frequent arguments and then roared at each other, Retzel no less loudly than Pfeiffer although the former seemed frail and small beside the colossal candy-maker.

Erland's work table was placed so that he had his back to the shop. He jumped at every bang and roar and was sick with fright when Pfeiffer thundered at his wife. But whenever she could do so unnoticed by her husband little Fru Pfeiffer would steal up to the boy and put her hand soothingly on his.

"Komm' mal her!" Pfeiffer shouted to Erland one day and

showed him a glass-covered box which a cabinet-maker had brought that morning. It was fitted with a strap to sling around one's neck, the box to be carried against the chest. Pfeiffer had been stacking it neatly with bars of chocolate and various candies.

"*Nu*," Pfeiffer growled, "*Du must in der city gehen* and *candy sellen*.—Put it *dies* way." He adjusted the strap around Erland's neck.

"*Damn must du herausrufen: 'Pfeiffer's candy!'—Verstehst du?*"

"Yah-ah. . . ."

"*Ja, das ist alles.—Geh' mal!*"

Erland went. At first he was quite proud of the blue lacquered box and noticed with no small satisfaction that he attracted people's attention. But however hard he tried he couldn't bring himself to cry out his wares as Pfeiffer had told him.

He rambled about the streets for a few hours without having sold a single penny-worth of his stuff. Then he came to the old beautiful King's Park, which he entered. The quiet shady paths, the grass, the trees and the flowers offered wonderful relief after the bustle and noise of the streets.

He walked out on a terrace of red-brown sandstone and stood looking down far below into the deep moat where some stately white swans glided through the still water, leaving in their wake an ever-widening wedge of ripples. The moat had been dug in the seventeenth century as part of the defensive works of the then small city, so Erland had heard from his father. Once upon a time fierce battles had been fought on this ground between Danes and Swedes. "When I was a boy," Peter had said, "people used to dig up whole skeletons here

and sell them to the rag-and-bone man. They found weapons, too, swords and carbines and things."

Looking across the moat, down below him, Erland had a view of yet another park, The Castle Park, spreading like a dream landscape with its greenery, canals and quiet lakes. Amidst a clump of trees an ancient wind-mill seemed lost in memories of by-gone days when its great wings responded to the brisk winds that came frolicking inland after a lusty swing over the blue tossing waters of the nearby Öresund. And further on, at the edge of the moat, lay Malmöhus Castle, now half a thousand years old. In that stronghold Mary Stuart's husband, the Earl of Bothwell, was once kept a prisoner for several years. That was at least one thing Erland remembered from his history lessons.

Having stood for a while looking at the beautiful scenery, Erland again went on along the path. He passed a bench where a young girl was sitting, reading a book. She looked up. "You haven't seen any of the Elise Jung boys around?" she asked. These boys carried a red tin box slung at the hip and sold candy of the famous Elise Jung make.

"No," said Erland. "But I'll try and find one of them—if you wish."

"Thanks," said the girl, smiling. She was quite pretty.

Erland flushed. He walked on, lingering as if he wished to say something. Presently he stopped. He hesitated, then went back to the girl. "Hm," he said, flushing still deeper, "I wonder—if it's candy you want—perhaps mine. . . ."

"Oh! I didn't know! Is it candy you have there in the box? I thought it was cigarettes. Of course, then I'll buy from you." Her smile was lovely. She picked two chocolates and a few bonbons.

It all amounted to fifteen öre, the first sale Erland had made. He felt strangely important as he walked away with the money in his pocket. At the bend of the path he turned round and glanced back at the girl. She was munching the chocolate, deeply engrossed in her book. Erland felt a pang that he was forgotten so soon. After all, she had smiled to him.

But the successful sale made him feel bolder. And when he met an old gentleman limping leisurely in the sun he said: "Pfeiffer's candy." But he didn't call out very loudly.

The man took no notice, but now Erland turned his attention to a row of young trees planted recently. "How straight and primly they stand," he thought. "Just like people meeting for the first time. They are not acquainted yet. Don't even dare touch each other. Look as if they had on their Sunday clothes and thought everyone was looking at them. . . ."

His meditations were interrupted by a sudden yell. "What th' hell are ye doin' here, say?"

On turning round he found himself face to face with one of the dreaded Elsie Jung boys. There was no tougher sort.

"Whaddarye doin' here?" the other demanded again.

"Doing? I'm selling candy. . . ."

"Sellin' candy, eh? Who told ye t'come in this here park, ye mopey mammy-boy? This's my territory, unnerstan'! Get t'hell outa here!"

"I—I have a right. . . . The park is free for all."

"Free! Get outa here, I say, before I free ye one in th' jaw! Lemme see yer permit."

"Permit . . . ?"

"Yeah! Permit! Haven't ye got a permit?"

"No—I. . . ."

"For Christ's sake, beat it then! Or I'll call a *byling** on ye!"

Erland slowly backed away. Permit! He didn't know anything about that. Perhaps it was true. Perhaps the Elise Jungs did have a privilege in the park. . . .

He again tried the streets. But people seemed too busy to stop and buy candy. And he felt he would only be annoying them by asking. He was near the railroad terminal when it began to rain and so he sought shelter in the waiting-room. It wouldn't do to get the new lacquered box all wet. A number of people were standing in there, waiting for the rain to pass. After some hesitation Erland approached a kind-looking young man and said, "Excuse me, mister—hm—you wouldn't buy some candy, would you . . . ?"

The man gave Erland a puzzled look. "You're a queer little fellow," he said.

Erland flushed deeply and turned to go.

"No, wait," said the man. "Just because you are queer I'll buy something from you. Let's see—what have you got? Well, I'll take a couple of chocolates. I don't eat that stuff myself but I'll save them for my young lady."

Ten öre. His second sale. Erland thought maybe business was picking up somewhat. When the rain stopped he went on the streets again. He walked around till it was getting dark, then returned to the shop. But when he neared the ramshackle-building he suddenly grew frightened. A heavy pressure contracted his breast. His knees shook as he climbed the dark stairway. He had sold only twenty-five öres' worth. What would Pfeiffer say?

He stole quietly into the shop and put the box on the work

* cop.

table, whereupon he went and handed Pfeiffer the twenty-five öre. The German stared silently at the coins which looked frightfully small in his powerful fist. Then he transferred his gaze to the box he had stacked this forenoon. Almost the entire lot remained. And for the greater part, it was spoiled beyond redemption, the sun having melted the chocolates which stuck together in big, sickly-looking lumps.

Suddenly Pfeiffer burst into an evil laugh, his bellowing voice booming out weirdly upon the silence of the half-dark shop. With a curse he flung the money into one of the murky corners of the room. He clenched his huge fists and took to pacing the floor, roaring out threats and curses that made Erland's knees weaken.

In the midst of all this Retzel came stumbling out of the smaller room, his limp hair drooping. He went and stared at the box and flung out his hands in a despairing gesture. "Ach!" he cried. "*Das ist ja schrecklich!*" He began to follow the murderous Pfeiffer as the latter in a savage mood went stalking back and forth over the creaking floor. Erland stood nervously fingering the blue box while he waited. His neck was stiff and sore from the strap.

"*Ja, ja! Gott im Himmel!—Verdammter Asse!*" Pfeiffer straddled his legs wide and rammed his fists into his trouser pockets so that the linings cracked. Little Fru Pfeiffer moused forth from the corner where she had bided. Silently and with nervous hands she began to empty the box. Erland turned to her, "Can I go now?" he whispered.

She made a fearful, hardly perceptible shake of her head and gave him a sign to keep quiet.

Pfeiffer came up to them, nodding ironically as he watched

his wife emptying the box. Then he took to cursing again. Suddenly he wheeled round and faced Erland. "Go!" he roared. "*Geh' nach Hause. Dummkopf!*"

Erland shrank back, fearing the German would strike him. He put on his cap and stepped quickly to the exit, lifted the latch and glided out, closing the door cautiously behind him.

He stopped for a moment on the pitch-black stairs to get his breath and to quiet the wild beating of his heart. From inside the shop came a loud crash followed by a curse and a roar from Pfeiffer. Erland hurried down the stairs, feeling his way in the darkness. When he came out on the street a transparent Northern summer twilight was hovering over the city. As he ran homewards he watched the stone-slabs edging the sidewalk.—If with an equal stride he could reach the next corner without stepping on any of the cracks, then something would happen so that he wouldn't have to go back to Pfeiffer's again. He ran on down the street with his eyes intently on the ground. It became necessary for him slightly to adjust his step but he defended himself on the score that the slabs were of such unequal length.

When he got home it was past ten o'clock. His father was asleep on a chair. The newspaper he had been reading had slipped to the floor from his relaxed fingers. Peter woke up as Erland stepped into the kitchen. "Good evening, Erland," he said, rubbing his hand across his face. "Just got home?"

"Yah. Has mother gone to her office cleaning?"

Peter nodded. "Yah. I just came home myself half an hour ago. Guess I fell asleep."

Erland found his supper on the table. While he was eating he looked through the window into the dark masses of young foliage moving softly in the bluish dusk. Now in the evening

the sounds from the city merged into a subdued humming. A dog wailed in the next yard.

Peter rose from the chair. "Good night, Erland," he said, "I had better go to bed, I think, otherwise I won't be able to get up tomorrow morning."

"Yah-ah. Good night, father."

11

PETER was really glad he didn't have to work overtime the following Sunday because at this time of the year he had many things to do in the koloni. He loved nothing so much as flowers. In the shop he was an expert on color schemes, and when he planted bulbs or flower seeds he was not so much concerned about getting daffodils, tulips, glories-of-the-snow, hyacinths or asters but whether he would have color harmony when the flowers bloomed. It was not always easy to tell beforehand what shade of color a flower would have. You take, for example, the columbines. Now, what more graceful and pretty sight ever charmed a gardener's eye! Lovely beyond description they nod and sway in the wind on their almost too slender stems. And in what reckless colors they burst into blossom—scarlet and orange, lilac and pink and purple and blue and gold! Peter was tremendously excited as he rushed about with spade and trowel, doing a lot of weeding and re-planting in order that not a single jarring note disturb the symphony of vari-colored, curling or smooth-flowing petals. But then—didn't people come from both near and far to admire his

wonderful garden! And Peter puffed and panted and perspired as he hauled heavy cans of water from a pump a long way off. For he couldn't let the flowers thirst, could he now, after they had endured the blazing sunshine all day long?

But the spirited columbines had many weeks ago spent themselves in their mad orgy of color and form. Patrician irises had stoically gone into decline and the bouncing blushing peonies had revelled to the full in robust health.

Now is the time of climbing roses, of many-bloomed blue delphiniums, of larkspurs, and white, pink, crimson, and purple hollyhocks. Peter is wading knee-high, breast-high, in a sea of perfumed color. His pants are water-splashed, his shoes muddy, but he doesn't mind, this man. He has turned up his shirt-sleeves and opened up his shirt at the neck, and now he bends his back to his task with a will. It would be strange if he couldn't make this koloni look something like what he has in his mind's eye, now, wouldn't it?

Around noon he sights Hanna over on the highway. She comes lugging a big basket covered with a white napkin. Her face is all smiles as she proceeds down the path that leads to the koloni.

"Hello, Peter!" she cries. "Are you hungry?"

Peter sticks that spade of his into the ground and straightens his back. He emphasizes the movement so that anyone might see that he has been working hard. He glances around at what he has done. Then he stands waiting.

"My, haven't you done a lot!" Hanna exclaims as she enters through the gate.

Peter gives a satisfied sniff. "I dug up those hollyhocks there that didn't fit in," he remarks.

She glances vaguely at the flower bed. "Ya-ah—I see. You've

planted some carrots, too, somewhere, haven't you? And spinach. You know, spinach is good for your health. It has iron in it."

They step into the tiny bungalow where Hanna begins to unpack the basket. "Meat balls," she says, smiling.

Peter sits down and slaps the dust off his trousers. He casts a glance out over the sun-flooded garden where a bee is droning by over the nodding flowers. And all at once he feels very solemn, as though he had been sitting in a church, listening to a moving sermon. A warm whiff of air brings into the small room a heavy sweet scent. Everything is so quiet. Sunday stillness. The wind's rustling among swaying boughs. And peace. . . .

Hanna is setting the table, serving the good things she has made for their lunch. Peter sees her face in profile against the bright light from outside. In repose her features seem cast in a sad yet calm and dignified mould. But when she speaks a smile comes to her lips. "Now, there, Peter, let's eat. I hope you'll like the meat balls. We'll have fruit jelly for desert." She produces a small bottle. "And here's your schnaps."

After they have finished eating Hanna goes outside and sits in the sun for a while, her small roughened hands very still in her lap as though they are trying to make the most of this short siesta. Peter is over in one of the flower beds, doing something with the spade again, his back bent, beads of perspiration trickling off his brow.

"You shouldn't work so hard right after lunch," says Hanna.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he tosses back a reply and thrusts the spade bravely into the ground. He points to the wooden bird's nest he made early in the spring and fixed up on a tall pole fastened to the roof of the bungalow. "Now I know why the

starlings won't make their nest there," he says. "I made the hole too large and so the big birds can get in and steal the eggs. I'll have to make another one."

"Yah, Yah," Hanna replies, nodding absent-mindedly. Her thoughts had been elsewhere.

"Now, Peter," she says, rising from the bench. "I'll be going home. I've a lot to do. We'll have dinner at three." She puts the basket on her arm. "So long, then. Rest a little. You work too hard."

Peter finds time to straighten his back. He moves his hand across his forehead. "Good-bye, Hanna. Yah, I'll be home at three. The lunch tasted good. Very good, Hanna." He leans on the spade handle, looking after his wife as she walks away. A neighbor is tending his garden near by, so Peter makes a little noise with the spade, pretending he is digging. But he is watching Hanna entering the highway. She walks very straight, carrying the basket on her arm. Ay, but in the sunshine her abundance of auburn hair looks gorgeous!

12

PETER was home at three all right and brought with him a big bouquet of flowers which he arranged very artistically in vases and jugs all over the house. He took this matter very seriously and there was a great deal of standing back with head cocked and eyes squinting and then stepping up to remove one flower and substitute another whose color would blend better into the general scheme.

As Hanna had dinner waiting she was all wrought up with the strain of trying to keep the food warm. She repeatedly stepped to the living-room door and watched nervously the way Peter was carrying on, but wisely refrained from making any comment.

At last he was done and came out and sat down to the table, brushing up his moustache and evidently very pleased with himself.

“Put plenty of sauce on the liver,” Hanna suggested, dryly. And after a pause she added: “I’m afraid it doesn’t taste like much now—having been kept in the oven so long.”

“Hm!” Peter defensively cleared his throat. His face fell a

little and Hanna instantly regretted her harsh words. But the matter was allowed to rest. In a short while the atmosphere cleared and the dinner came off very successfully.

Later in the afternoon grandmother and Ida came for a short visit. Grandma was Peter's stepmother and so Ida, aged fifteen, was only his half-sister. They came directly from church where they had attended evensong service, for they were both very strict and religious. On Sundays they went to church twice, high mass in the forenoon and evensong at five in the afternoon. One could tell merely by looking at them that they were very holy in their thoughts, for they were always dressed in black.

Grandma, who was short and stocky, wore a black silk shawl around her shoulders, and her black and very wide and full woollen skirt trailed a little behind. For head dress she wore a smaller black shawl with a soft white one edging forth underneath; she used the latter especially in the winter when she said she needed something extra to protect her head from the cold. She wore very sensible shoes, grandma did, plain and with low heels, so one could see that her heart wasn't set on any of the world's vanities. Her broad, large-featured face was full of kindness and love and had a repose that revealed how grandma walked before the face of her Maker.

She was very fond of Peter but then he always took great care to show her respect. "For, you see," he said to Hanna, "a woman like her is always a little sensitive. She will fancy that her stepchildren feel she has intruded herself by marrying their father. So one has to be extra careful not to hurt her."

Ay, it gave the children such a wonderful feeling of holiday when grandma and Ida came, black-dressed and quiet, each with a small gilt-edged Bible and an immaculate white

handkerchief in her hand. And there was about them such a smell of spices, for when going to church they each always took a small lump of rock candy and a piece of cinnamon which helped keep them from getting drowsy if the sermon were more than usually long.

"Little Aunt" was the nickname the children had given to Ida in order to distinguish her from other aunts who were grown-up like father and mother. Something about Little Aunt made one think of the Martyrs and other holy people who had suffered for their Lord. She was always very quiet when she came with grandma, but her blue eyes bore a strangely searching expression, and then again, sometimes, she seemed very, very far away. Her eyelids were often red-rimmed, as if she had been crying. She had a keen, irregular face and naturally red cheeks which emphasized even more strongly the Christian severity of her black attire.

Grandma wore a shawl for head dress but Ida, being younger, was allowed a hat. But it was a very pious-looking hat, black and demure and made of very uncomfortable-feeling straw. It was crammed down ruthlessly over Little Aunt's mass of blond springy curls. A string under her chin held the hat in place, but even so one felt that any moment those rebellious curls would shoot the black straw off Little Aunt's head so they could be given a chance to spin out and play and be themselves for once.

Few things worried grandma more than Ida's hair. "Dear child," she would say, "do get those curls away from yer face. Push them in under the hat." She laughed good-naturedly and rocked on the sofa. "I don't know what to do with yer hair. It makes ye look wicked, I think. I'm almost frightened at times."

Little Aunt stuck the offensive curls back under the black straw but in the next moment they gleefully wormed their way out again. While grandma was talking to Peter and Hanna Little Aunt absently turned the pages in her Bible. There were book-marks here and there, passages, no doubt, which bore a special message for her. She drew a deep sigh. Today her eyelids were sore and red-rimmed again. And always when she had been crying her red lips swelled. Their very thin skin made one oddly aware how blood-filled they were. And 'twas a pity she should have a hare-lip, even if it wasn't so very strongly pronounced. But it did look strange on such a religious person, no getting away from that.

Little Aunt, too, wore plain shoes like grandma, only she had to have them specially made with the sole on the right shoe thicker than the one on the left because there was something the matter with her foot and she had a slight limp. But no one minded that.

Ay, and it was good for both heart and eye when one saw grandma and Ida coming on their Sunday visit, grandma waddling in a nice comforting grandmother fashion, Little Aunt with her arm stuck into the crook of grandma's elbow, a slight limp as she went, and both of them with Bible and white handkerchief and smelling churchily of cinnamon and cloves. Truly it was Sunday afternoon itself that came ringing the door bell.

13

ABOUT an hour after they had left, Uncle Hasse came. Britta was playing in the street when she spied him, and she followed him upstairs, because he was bringing with him the customary paper bag of cracked biscuits, and if she wasn't in time Britta knew very well where all the pieces with filling would go. For had she not a certain brother named Nils?

Now, Uncle Hasse wasn't an uncle, really, but such an old friend of the family that uncle seemed the only right thing to call him. He was a rugged, weather-beaten man of forty-five who made a living doing odd jobs around the harbor. At present he served with the hawser carriers—those tanned and steel-muscled fellows who in their sturdy rowboats speed back and forth between quays and piers, carrying the cables of incoming and outgoing ships and helping them to dock or get under way.

Uncle Hasse had one weak point and that was his wish to be taken for an old salt-water tar. He liked to hint about far-away shores he had visited and tough encounters at sea with typhoons and hurricanes. Peter just loathed him when he

started on that track. "Huh!" he would snort when alone with Hanna, "I bet he hasn't been farther than Copenhagen." And that, of course, wasn't saying very much, for the regular ferry between Malmö and the Danish capital crossed the narrow Öresund in less than two hours.

As Uncle Hasse stepped inside the door little Nils gave a savage yell and ran for his toy gun. Thus armed, and terribly scowling, he faced the would-be seaman. "Hands up, you-u!" he roared. "Stand still!"

Uncle Hasse obeyed. Having flung the bag with biscuits onto the table, he stuck up both arms and stood as one numb with fright. "Please, dear robber," he whimpered, "don't take all my money!"

"But I will!—I'll take everything!" said the heartless highwayman, advancing with his finger on the toy gun's trigger.

"Where d'ye keep 'em?" he demanded, tilting back his head and boring his blue eyes into the scared ones of Uncle Hasse. Little Nils tossed his fair wild hair because this was a grand moment with the whole family watching.

"I don't have any money," Uncle Hasse sniveled, still with his hands stuck into the air.

"You liar! Liar!—I'll see!" And one after one Nils ransacked his victim's pockets and turned them inside out.

Presently he gave a triumphant shout. "Here!—You-u-u! He snatched Uncle Hasse's purse out of a back pocket where it had been tucked away. He growled and emptied its contents on the table. 'Twas all one-penny pieces. Fifteen of them.

Hanna shook her head. "Hansson, you're entirely spoiling that boy. This mustn't go on."

But Uncle Hasse only laughed as he stood straddling his legs, seaman-like in his navy-blue double-breasted suit and

brown ever-creaking shoes. Still chuckling, he picked from the breast pockets of his waistcoat some silver and a small wad of banknotes which he put into the purse the highwayman obligingly had handed back to him.

"Sit down, now, Hansson, and let's have coffee," said Hanna as she carried in the wonderfully smelling sugar cake she had baked.

"Yah—thanks, Hanna." Uncle Hasse seated himself. "Ha!" He sniffed contemptuously. "Some swiny things going on down at the harbor these days!"

"The dockers still on strike?" Hanna asked, her face suddenly grave.

"Strike!" Uncle Hasse snorted. "Ha! You think that's all! Don't you read the papers? About the strikebreakers the ship-owners have brought from England? God curse them! Now here's a country for you! Bringing foreign trash to snatch the bread out of the mouths of their own workers! Ach!" Uncle Hasse hissed with indignation. In his excitement he tumbled no fewer than four spoonfuls of sugar into his coffee. "Revolution is the only thing that'll help! . . . Those damned scabs!"

"Brought them from England, you say?" Peter asked dubiously. "Is that true?"

"True! Why, of course, it's true! A whole shipload of them. Four hundred. Amalthea's the name of the boat. All bums an' trash they've picked up along the English docks. Goddamn scabs! Why, the union men went down an' tried to reason with them. An' d'you know what they did? They slapped their behinds an' thumbed their noses! That's the kind of bloody. . . ."

"Hansson!" Hanna made a furtive sign. "The children. . . ."

Uncle Hasse glanced round and met the absorbed gaze of little Nils, who was standing back of his chair. "Huh—!" Uncle Hasse swallowed his anger. But he was red in the face. He grabbed his spoon and shoved it around violently in his cup.

Hanna sighed. "What'll happen now?"

"Happen! Whatever does happen in this godforsaken country? Does anything ever happen? Ach! The workers haven't any guts! Look what happened up North! Didn't the mill-owners import Finnish strike-breakers to squash the unions? Yah! And who did anything to stop that? Ach!"

"Where in Heaven's name will it all lead to?" Hanna said anxiously. "Do the papers tell about anything except strikes and lockouts? One never has peace in one's breast the way one is always hearing about all this trouble. People thrown out of work, starvation and misery! Why can't they be allowed to earn their bread? That much at least, I think, every human being has a right to."

"Because it's a bum country, that's why," Uncle Hasse snapped. "Taxes are about all they know how to give a poor devil."

Hanna sighed again. "Take some more coffee?" she said. "And for God's sake let's talk about something cheerful! Don't let's poison a Sunday evening. I won't be able to sleep tonight if we carry on like this."

After the coffee Peter took off his shoes and laid himself down on the sofa for a rest. Uncle Hasse started to tell little Nils about the North Sea. "Sure," he said. "It's a tough place, all right. Especially in the winter. I remember how once when I was with a ship we got into a thundering storm an' had the sea head-on. Why, the stokers worked like they were crazy

an' still the ship went backwards—that gives you an idea. An' on deck the air was so full of salt an' spray an' rain you couldn't see your nose. Talking about seas! Why, they came crashing down on us high as three-story houses! We lost two of our lifeboats. They were just smashed to pieces . . . well. . . .” He glanced at Peter who demonstratively turned round on the sofa, his face to the wall. “It's a tough place. . . .”

Peter pretended to be asleep. He even snored a few times. But when, around eight o'clock, Hanna wrapped her shawl about her and said she was going to the post-office—ay, but then Peter proved to be awake well enough and said he would come along and help her.

“I'll come too,” said Uncle Hasse, rising on his creaking shoes. “I'll do the mopping. That's one thing you learn how to do at sea. Why, I used to swab the commando bridge every morning. . . .”

“Hm,” said Peter. He cleared his throat loudly and glanced at Hanna. “Come, let's go. Or else I go to sleep again.”

14

ONE night in July Hanna and Peter were suddenly startled out of their sleep by a cannon-like report that rocked the whole city of Malmö.

"Jesus! What's this?" Hanna cried. Both she and Peter jumped out of bed and ran and thrust their heads out of the windows and peered anxiously into the summer night's dusk. All along the street windows were flung open by nervous people who shouted questions to each other as to what had happened. But no one knew.

Hanna threw a blanket around her shoulders and hurried out on the stairs. Several housewives and their husbands were crowding on the landing, all with some odd garments flung loosely over their night clothes.

"What's happened, Fru Bergsson?" Hanna breathlessly asked her neighbor upstairs. "This shot—was it an explosion, or what?"

Fru Bergsson only shook her head. She didn't know. No one knew. But they hazarded the wildest guesses. Someone thought it might have been the city's huge gas tank that had

blown up. Carpenter Fridman shouted from downstairs that now the Russians had come at last and war was on, but no one paid much attention to him, as in the past he had proved himself too flabbergabby and eager to be thought a humorist.

Gradually the tenants quieted down somewhat and went back into their respective flats. But Hanna and Peter lay awake for a long time, talking in subdued voices about the possible meaning of the ominous shot. Now the night was again quiet, with silence ebbing back over the disturbance. And yet Hanna found it difficult to fall asleep. She lay watching the pale light of the July summer night seeping between the curtain cracks into the dark room.

The dull detonation? . . . That angry roar out of somewhere. . . .

15

EXTRA! *Extra!*

AMALTHEA BOMBED! ONE KILLED!

Extra! Extra! . . .

EARLY in the morning Hanna was awakened by newsboys yelling in the street. "Peter!" she cried. "Wake up! Do you hear! Amalthea's bombed! That was the shot we heard. Oh God! . . ."

She snatched her clothes from a chair and began to dress in feverish haste. But the door bell rang before she had finished. And when with trembling hand she had unlocked the door, there stood Uncle Hasse, all out of breath and his face flushed. "Morning, Hanna," he puffed and stepped into the hall. "Now the swine have gotten theirs! I've been up all night. . . ."

"Hansson, for God's sake, tell what's happened!" Hanna almost shouted. "I'm sick with all this. . . ."

"Happened!—Morning, Peter." Uncle Hasse entered into the living-room. "Why, didn't you hear the explosion? The anarchists blew up the *Amalthea* last night. One of the scabs got killed an' a whole lot o' them were rushed to the hospital. Jesus, some night! You should've been down there!" Uncle Hasse dropped onto a chair and wiped the sweat from his face. "The whole police force out. Searching all over the harbor for dynamite the anarchists had hidden away.—Phew!"

Peter had gotten out of bed but he was only partly dressed. He now sat on the bed's edge, looking silently before him, his face grave.

"Sure, that's what it is," Uncle Hasse went on. "Now we'll have war with England."

"War!" cried Hanna, putting both hands on her breast.

"Sure. What d'you think? England will avenge its nationals."

"Oh, God!" Hanna moaned. "What's to become of us? Always there's something! . . . Never a breathing spell. . . ."

"This won't help the workers any," said Peter quietly. "Violence gets you nowhere."

"No—an' what does get you anywhere?" Uncle Hasse frowned. "Those scabs got what was coming to them, take it from me. An' don't say they weren't given a fair chance. Why, the union men have been down there every day, trying to talk sense to them. They even printed a circular in English an' sent it aboard an' explained that it was rotten of outsiders t'come an' spoil everything the way they did. An' what d'you think they answered? Why, they laughed at the crowd on the dock! Those damn swine! That's what they did. But they've gotten theirs."

Hanna heaved a deep sigh. She went out into the kitchen

and made coffee for their breakfast. When Peter had washed himself and dressed they sat down to the table.

"One of the men was killed, did you say?" Hanna asked Uncle Hasse.

"Yah—an' the rest o' them were pretty well blown to bits."

"God have mercy on them!" Hanna murmured. Her expression showed pain and pity. "Poor people," she went on. "After all, they're human beings. . . . Maybe they have families in England—wives and children."

"Ach!" Uncle Hasse snorted. He gulped his coffee. "They're just some loose goddamn trash. An' why th' hell did they have t'come here?"

Peter was ready to leave for his work. Uncle Hasse rose. "I'm going, too," he said. "Just wanted you people to know about the affair. Don't be so upset, Hanna. Why, there mightn't be any war, after all. P'r'aps the government will do something."

But when they both had left Hanna again anxiously put her hands on her breast. She could hardly get her breath. The bomb that had exploded during the night seemed to her like a foreboding of coming disaster, a threatening reminder of the insecurity of their existence. She went into the living-room and stood looking down on the sleeping children. The innocent ones . . . they knew nothing about the hostility and the danger that surrounded them.

Hanna's glance swept round the room. Their home was so small, their needs so few. She suddenly wondered why they should be grudged this little and be compelled to fight so bitterly for their bread. To her harried imagination it seemed as if disaster might at any moment enter in through that window, or through that door. She felt a passionate need of

help from someone stronger than herself, someone to back her up in this unequal struggle.

And to whom could she turn but to Him who knows the sorrows of every heart and who had guided her in the past!

She folded her hands but felt too tremulous to pray. So she just held her clasped hands hard against her breast and tried to feel strength and courage flow into her heart.

16

NEXT day in the afternoon little Nils came running home from the vacant lot beyond the other end of the street where he had been sailing his toy boat in the muddy water of an old excavation.

"Look, mother," he cried happily and extended his hand. "I've got twenty-five öre!"

"Let me comb your hair," said Hanna. "You look awful. Where did you get the money?"

"A p'lliceman gave it t'me because I was looking for dynamite." Little Nils' blue eyes shone with a clear light.

Hanna almost dropped the comb. She stared dazedly down at the boy. "Dy-dynamite! . . ." she faltered. "Good God, what is it you're telling me?"

"Yah," little Nils eagerly volunteered his information. "They've hidden the dynamite away—the anarchists have. The p'licemen gave us twenty-five öre each an' we turned up our pants an' looked for it in the mud."

Hanna put her hands to her head. Her lips twitched. "Nils," she said in very faint tones. "Did—did you find any dynamite?"

"No," he replied sadly. "But I'm gonna look again."

"You're staying right here," said Hanna. And now she was angry. "Come, let me see what you have there in your pockets." She cautiously fingered around the outside of his trouser-pockets and the small pocket of his blouse, then, gaining courage, she put her hand into them but they contained nothing except a ball of yarn and a few fish hooks, two safety pins and some odds and ends like a small piece of brass, two marbles and lots of bread crumbs.

After the ransacking little Nils sidled toward the door, but Hanna stopped him. "Only over my dead body do you get out of this kitchen!" she cried half hysterically. "God Almighty! The police putting innocent children to hunt for dynamite! I think I'll go crazy!"

Presently she gave a gasp. Her eyes stared. She had caught sight of a small bit of something black which little Nils held in the hollow of his hand. "Jesus!" she screamed, backing away. "Is that dynamite?"

"No," said Nils. "It's only a piece of carbon. Dynamite looks like shoe-polish."

"Shoe-polish! . . . How do you know? . . ."

"Oh, some of the boys found a whole lot in a lumberyard. They put it on their shoes but the police said 'twas dynamite."

Hanna swallowed hard. She moistened her lips. She went and closed the door and put the key into her apron pocket. Then she sat down on a chair and took to staring at the floor.

Little Nils stood for a while playing with the carbon, then he prudently retired to the sofa. For something in the very atmosphere told him that this was a moment to keep absolute silence.

17

AMALTHEA BOMBED BY ANARCHISTS!
ONE KILLED. TWENTY WOUNDED.

First Bomb in Swedish Social Struggle!

PROPAGANDA OF
VIOLENCE!

Do We Live Under Revolution?

THREE TERRORISTS
ARRESTED.

TERRORISM!

*Dynamite stolen from Klagen
hamn's limestone quarry.*

SABOTAGE!

NOW the various daily papers had something for fat, black headlines. In the evening, reading from the Social-Democratic organ, *Arbetet*, Peter quoted snatches to Hanna while she was mending clothes.

"In view of this tragic occurrence we must once more emphasize that violence and force are foreign to the principles of Social-Democracy. Only constructive, intelligent and untiring action of a well-organized labor class will ultimately rear a sound social structure free from those evils which febrile and misguided minds hope to remedy by means of bloodshed and terroristic methods. . . ."

"That's exactly what I think!" said Peter, looking up from the paper. "It has to be done gradually if it shall last."

"Yah—hm," said Hanna, continuing her mending. "Did the police catch them, did you say?"

"Yah, sure. All three of them. They say they don't know a thing about dynamite. They had no idea it would be such a strong explosion; they thought they'd just make a loud crack to frighten the strikebreakers so they'd go back to England again."

"They should've stayed there in the first place," Hanna retorted. "No wonder Hansson was so angry about it all—they slapping their behinds and thumbing their noses at people who tried to reason with them. It's indecent, that's what I call it."

"Yah, oh, well, they've no bringing up, you understand," said Peter. "People of that kind haven't." He went on reading. "It says here that Nilsson threw the bomb into a cargo hatch in the ship's side. There was a heavy cable chain fastened across the port. It says, 'At the explosion a gaping hole was torn in the side-plating, and the chain was shattered to pieces which were hurled into the ship, wounding a score of the strikebreakers and killing one of the men.'"

"Oh, but that's terrible!" Hanna burst out. She let the mend-

ing sink into her lap and looked up, staring at Peter with her eyes large and dark. "That's terrible!" she said again. "I don't care if they're strikebreakers or not, but no one has a right to do such a thing to them!"

"No, no," Peter agreed. "It's dreadful! And still—it says here that those young fellows, the anarchists, I mean, they thought they were doing a good deed. But this'll do much harm to the Social-Democracy. It might tear down what we've been working on for many years. Now the government has an excuse for making all sorts of laws and interfering with the workers' organizations."

Hanna sighed and again took to plying her needle. "I don't understand it, Peter," she said. "So help me God, I don't. You would think we were having war all the time the way things are carried on. Here's the rich people fighting the workers, and the workers fighting the rich. What's it all about? Why can't people just be a little kind to each other and live in peace? I should think there's enough trouble in the world as it is, what with sickness and everything. People are crazy the way they're fighting each other."

18

THE country was in a state of high tension as the trial of the young anarchists began. The conflict down at the docks came to a sudden end and the strikebreakers were shipped back to England. On the eighteenth of September the verdict fell—death for Nilsson and Rosberg; and for Stern hard labor for life.

The Supreme Court, however, changed Rosberg's sentence to hard labor, as for Stern, and one day when Hanna picked up a newspaper she read in heavy type:

KING PARDONS NILSSON
SENTENCE COMMUTED TO PENAL SERVITUDE
FOR LIFE

“Ah!” said Hanna, wiping her eyes. “He's a good man, after all, the king is, pardoning the poor man. I like him for that!”

And shortly after the bombing had taken place word came that King Gustav would visit the wounded Englishmen in the Malmö Municipal Hospital.

Ay, and if the king was coming to Malmö then Hanna would go and have a look at him, no mistake. The daily papers gave the exact time of his arrival from the capital. And fortunately for Hanna the hospital was located only a stone's throw from Flint Street.

"Go down in the yard and play," Hanna commanded Britta and Nils on the day of the Royalty's visit to town. When alone she heated some water on the oil-stove and enjoyed a thorough washing of herself. After that she put on her black Sunday skirt and a white blouse. For it might be the last as well as the first time in her life that she would ever have a chance to see the king, and she wanted to do it properly.

A big crowd had already gathered in front of the post-office when Hanna reached the corner. The landlord was there and he hadn't even changed from his blue dungaree. What a slop! And she caught sight of Fru Svensson and the Krokwoman, the latter as usual with an unwashed face. Hanna felt both indignant and embarrassed on their account. What would the king think of this neighborhood? Some people had not the slightest feeling for what an occasion demanded!

And—also—it seemed to Hanna that the crowd could have chosen a different subject for conversation on a day like this. True, she was almost working her hands to the bones, trying to bring up enough money for the taxes, but even so she didn't like to hear the king spoken of as a bastard.

For that's what that raw, big-mouthed carpenter Fridman called him. "He ought t'get a lil' bomb himself, the bastard!" Fridman was braying as he stood, a head taller than anyone else, straddling his legs, as always wanting to show off and let people hear what a man he was.

Hanna edged a little closer to Fridman, indignation color-

ing her cheeks already flushed enough by the bright sunshine. If there was any bombing to be done she would be at hand as surely as Lance was her maiden name!

"I would like t'see if the bastard's goin' to shake hands with those goddamn scabs!" Fridman again raised his voice.

With a few jabbing jerks of her elbows Hanna pushed her way through the crowd up to where carpenter Fridman stood.

"Good day, Fridman!" she said with a friendliness that seemed to imply danger when coupled with those flashing stabs from her steel-blue eyes. "You've a big broad snout, haven't you?" she added.

She raised herself on her toes so as to get closer to Fridman's face. Her voice was now barely a whisper but 'twas taut as the sound from a twanging string. "What did you call the king?" she asked.

Fridman's cocksureness paled on his flat face. He seemed greatly annoyed and glanced furtively to right and left at the sniggering crowd. Then he took to staring stonily down the street as if he wished something would happen.

But not yet. More people arrived and stood sweating in the sun and tramping on each other's toes, pushing and elbowing. A detachment of police shoved the crowd back up on the sidewalk. Hanna was thinking how strange that here she stood in front of the post-office, waiting for the king. She wished he could have known she was the one doing the cleaning in there. She looked proudly at the big windows, flashing in the sunlight. The previous night she and Peter had spent hours climbing up and down ladders, each with a soft rag in one hand and in the other a bottle of denatured alcohol, rubbing at the plate glass until it shone darkly as the still surface of a lake at nightfall.

Presently she is rocked out of her reverie by a low, swelling sound rolling toward the post-office corner from away down Berg Street.

"He's coming! Here he comes!" The crowd starts shouting. They jab and push, everyone trying to get out in front. Hanna feels a tug at her skirt, and on glancing down there is little Nils who has wormed his way in between people's legs but almost lost his clothes in the process.

Hanna nervously smooths his hair but she hasn't much time. Cheers and hurrahs and cries of "Long live the king!" are thundering upon her ears. And stretching herself and peering down the street she sees how a few blocks off the sun flashes and glitters on the polished brass helmet-peaks of the mounted police.

The crowd is a troubled sea rolling dangerously near the post-office windows. Hanna and little Nils are carried helplessly along as the noisy wave now surges away toward the middle of the street. But on meeting the breakwater of the police the onrush is stopped. There is a crush and a motionless moment, a lot of cursing and a many-throated moan as the crowd again falls back.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!—Hurrah for the king!" The rat-a-tat, rat-a-ta-tat of iron-shod hoofs clattering bravely against the Berg Street pavement. Mounted police proudly jogging by on mane-tossing horses. And from the gesticulating crowd breaks a thundering roar: "Hurrah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!" Into view comes an elegant black-lacquered carriage, swift and noiseless on rubber-ringed wheels and drawn by six finely-bred horses.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah for the king!"

Hanna is staring tensely at the distinguished-looking tall

man with golden pince-nez on his nose and dressed in black and with a silk top hat. She gives an involuntary squeeze to little Nils' hand, completely unaware of his frantic demands to be lifted up so that he too can get a look at the king. Hanna is quite pale. Here he is, the one she is slaving for and worrying for! There is the one for whom she is paying these awful taxes. . . .

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" The crowd is yelling. "Hurrah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!" And that big-snouted carpenter Fridman is howling loudest of all.

It lasts but the flash of a second and the carriage with the king of the land has sped by. As Hanna stands there in the jostling crowd, gazing after the vehicle, she suddenly becomes conscious of little Nils, who keeps beating her with his tiny fists; he is half choked with despairing sobbing. "Mother! Mother! Oh! Oh! Oh, gee! I want to see him too!"

"Yah, little Nils." Hanna's voice is uncommonly tender. For she has a feeling as if something very good and kind had been liberated within her in that short moment when she was gazing at the king's grave face. Now, bending down, she lifts little Nils up in her arms. "There, Nils! You see him?" She points after the carriage gliding away between the cheering crowds. Nils' eyes grow big and round as he is straining to see the king. But then his face breaks into a miserable aspect and he bursts into bitter tears. "Oh!—Oh, gee!" he sobs brokenheartedly. "I can only see his hat!"

"Now—now. . . ." Hanna couldn't think of any consolation to offer. So she silently put the crying boy down on the ground again and they pushed through the dissolving crowd and turned back home. Carpenter Fridman came with a bland face and tried to start a conversation, but Hanna stared

haughtily past him and didn't even reply to his exclamation, "Now, isn't that king of ours a grand-looking man!" For Hanna wasn't the one likely to have any truck with people who called the king vile names.

When she got home she took off her Sunday clothes and started to work on a dress for Vanda. She was very quiet, and time and again she halted in her work and sat in deep meditation. Presently she put the material aside and went into the living-room. She stepped up to the bureau and opened the shirt drawer. From under Peter's and Erland's white ironed shirts and collars she took a small box. Out of the box she took an envelope. Out of the envelope she took eight kronor in neatly-folded bills—money she had put aside for the tax. She got two kronor a day for doing people's washing, so here were her earnings for four full days' work. And 'twas all for the king, for that fine, serious-faced man she had seen in the horse-drawn carriage.

As Hanna stood there with the money in her hand such wonderment came over her. For to think that she, a poor simple workman's wife, was allowed to care and work for the king! She fingered the bills. He would have these. He would touch them himself, maybe. How strange! What would he use them for? Perhaps get himself a pair of shoes. Wonder if he paid more than twenty-five kronor for them? Peter got his for twelve-fifty at a sale.

But the king had looked so pale and thin, Hanna thought. She wondered if he was getting the right kind of food. They probably ate a lot of pastry and such stuff at court, and ~~every~~ one knows that isn't good for one's health. Ay, but had he ever tasted a fruit soup such as she cooked for Peter on Sundays?

19

THE echoes of the bombing gradually sank into the background and merged with the rumblings of the strikes and lockouts that were forever disturbing the labor market. And the country continued in its everyday occupations, the poor, as always, braving an unequal struggle for their daily bread.

Erland's work with Pfeiffer came to a sudden end when one day the German was evicted for not having paid his rent.

Now Hanna arranged for Erland to go with another boy, Kalle Åberg, and sell newspapers. Kalle said he sometimes earned as much as four kronor in one night.

Erland had his misgivings, but he went. At the printing office he jostled with a crowd of ragamuffins during the hectic moments when the papers came off the press. He got fifty copies. "And now," said Kalle, "all you do is to run along in front of people and cry: '*The Evening Post!* Papers! *The Evening Post!*'"

Erland looked with wonder at the boys scattering in all directions as if blown off by a cyclone. Marvelous how fast

they ran! Even the very small boys! And how they yelled! "*Evening Post!* Papers! *The Evening Post!*!" Erland didn't quite like the noise. He thought it grated on the evening stillness.

But now he bestirred himself and hurried along, trying to find a street corner not yet occupied by a newsboy. For Kalle had warned him not to compete on another's territory. Each fellow had his own beat.

Ay, but Erland soon reached the conclusion that he wasn't needed in the news business. No. There wasn't a single street corner to spare. Wherever he turned he saw the quick-darting newsboys. They glared at him merely because he walked their way. "Get out o'here, milkface!" they snarled. "Whaddaye want!"

"Nothing," he said. "I just. . . ."

"Shut up, you-u! None o' yer lip! Get out!"

He hurried along. And now he thought he had a brilliant idea. The bridge near the railroad station would be an excellent place, what with all the people passing to and from the trains. He stretched his legs in a gallop. But when, puffing and all out of breath, he arrived at the bridge, he found two boys there already, one at each end.

He walked on. Further away, among the docks, there were no newsboys, and here he began crying out his papers. "*The Evening Post!* Papers! *The Evening Post!*!" He was emboldened by the sale of a few copies but not many people came this way. And it was getting quite dark. Sky and sea melted into one somber grey. Red and green lights gleamed magically away out in the dusk, off the shore, and there was a monotonous clanging of bell-buoys.

As he walked along the quay he listened to the lapping

of water against the wooden piles. From out of the sea's increasing darkness rolled the long-drawn moan of a siren, the sound groping its way languidly among the lonely dock quarters.

Then two mastlights came into view and a ship's sidelights. Out of the darkness loomed the towering mass of a steamer, slowly advancing and entering the narrow inlet between the two pier-heads. A bell jingled; the ship turned smoothly in a wide curve, gliding, silent and mysterious, in from the vast sea. On the ship's bridge stood a lone man, peering ahead. The ship glided on, with not a sound except the propeller's slow churning of water, away to its berth somewhere in the harbor, its black mass becoming one with the darkness of night, only its mastlights gleaming. . . .

Erland turned round and looked citywards. A confused murmur reached him from the lighted area. Occasional louder sounds flared up. It might be the newsboys, he thought. He felt a sudden panic, for he had at least forty papers left. He hurried away from the pier-head. Two dock workers crossed his path. "Papers!" he said, but they didn't even look his way. He walked as near the railroad station as he dared without interfering with the boys in that section. "Papers! *The Evening Post!*" During the next hour he sold eight papers. The following hour, five.

At ten o'clock he had twenty-nine papers left. Most of the other boys had gone home by now, and so he was at liberty to sell his papers where he might. From ten to eleven he sold two more copies; from eleven to twelve, one.

Since hardly any people were now on the streets, he went on his way home with the twenty-six remaining papers. He felt miserable and unhappy as he trudged along the dark

streets. But in spite of it all his pulse quickened when he entered the yard and saw a light in the kitchen window. That meant mother was still up.

She was mending clothes when he stepped into the kitchen. He noticed at once that she looked worried. "But where have you been?" she asked. Her eyes fell on his papers. "Why—do you bring them home with you?"

His face flushed. "Yah," he stammered. "I—I couldn't sell them all."

Hanna looked at him with disfavor. "Good God!" Her voice had an unwonted bitterness. "I always said there's no spunk in you, Erland! Now look at Kalle Åberg! I'm sure he has made several kronor tonight!"

Erland's flush deepened. He put the bundle of papers on a chair.

"Why didn't you bring the papers back to the printing office?" Hanna asked him sharply.

"It was too late," he mumbled.

"Too late! Fool! And why did you moon about on the streets till this time of the night? Why didn't you come home?"

He did not answer.

"You take the papers back to the office the first thing in the morning," Hanna resumed. "Otherwise you'll have the police after you."

"The police!" he repeated alarmed.

"Sure! What do you think?"

He sighed. He sat down silently to his supper, feeling he was no earthly good. There was nothing he could do right. Even his poems were probably no good, with bad rhymes and everything. . . .

He glanced furtively at his mother where she sat in the

pale lamplight, bending deep over her mending, her lips tight. He chewed slowly. He was hardly able to swallow the food. At last he put down his knife and sat staring at the plate. His lips quivered. "Mother," he said, "I'm sorry. . . . I'll try to get another job."

She looked up, and now he saw tears in her eyes. "Oh, it isn't because you didn't make out tonight—not exactly. . . ." She suddenly began weeping, and covered her face with her hands. "Close the door," she whispered. "We mustn't wake father."

Erland pulled the door to, then went shyly to his mother's side. She put her arm around him with an abrupt movement, picked up her apron and wiped her eyes.

"Mother—what's happened?"

She sighed. But her voice sounded hard when she replied, "They're coming to take our belongings tomorrow."

He felt a sudden stab at his heart. He stared questioningly into his mother's face. "The tax collector?" he whispered.

She nodded, biting her lips. Her tears began to flow again.

Presently the door opened and Peter came into the kitchen. He blinked in the gas light. He had pulled on his trousers; his feet were bare. "I couldn't sleep," he said quietly, glancing at the clock. It showed a quarter past one.

He sat down on the sofa, and slumped into deep thought. He seemed tired. His face was drawn.

"I'm sorry I woke you up," Hanna mumbled, mastering her tears.

"You didn't. I've been awake all night." He looked at Erland. "You up yet?"

The boy lowered his eyes. Again a flush crept over his face. He glanced at the bundle of papers in the chair.

"He just came home," said Hanna. "Tried to make something selling papers, but I guess there's too many at it."

All three of them were silent. The night was very still. Even the great old tree outside the window remained quiet, without a rustle or murmur, as if it, too, was stunned by this calamity that had come to the home.

"Erland—you had better go to bed," said Hanna.

He stepped over behind a corner of the sofa and slipped out of his clothes. "Good night," he said in a low voice as he crawled under the blanket.

"Good night," said his parents. Peter's voice sounded very sad but it possessed a certain calm.

Erland turned his face to the wall and lay brooding about the dreaded tomorrow. He felt sick at the thought of how their home would look with all the nice things taken away. He wished fervently he was grown-up and able to earn a lot of money so that this thing wouldn't happen. Then he again thought of his failure at selling papers. He buried his face in the pillows.

Peter and Hanna sat for a while talking about the next day. Their subdued voices sounded very somber in the midnight stillness.

"Yah," said Peter at last. "Come, let's go to bed, Hanna. Let us leave it all in God's hand."

Hanna rose. Before she put out the light she bent over Erland. "He's asleep," she said to Peter. "He is all tired out."

20

IN THE morning, when he drank his coffee, Peter said gravely to Hanna: "Don't be downhearted. When they come just don't say anything. This is unjust but we'll have to bear it."

He put on his hat and was ready to go, but first he stepped to the living-room door and stood there looking into the room. He cleared his throat. "Hm—good-bye, Hanna," he said, "we'll talk things over when I get home tonight." He went slowly to the door.

When he had left, Hanna sat down and buried her face in her hands. But presently Erland saw her raising her tear-stained face. She clasped her hands in a fierce, passionate grip and gazed straight before her as if she were looking at invisible things. . . .

The door bell rang shortly after ten o'clock. Hanna was pale but composed as she went to the door. She stood aside and let the man enter, without looking at him. It was not the collector himself but an appraiser, a businesslike man of about forty. He strode into the room and stood in the middle

of the floor without removing his hat. He looked indifferently about him.

Erland went white in the face at the brazenness of this stranger who dared to force himself into their home in this manner. He sought his mother's eyes. Her face was hard. She stood with her hands folded in front, never even looking at the man but seemingly aware of his every movement.

He took a pen from his pocket and wrote something on a small white ticket he had. He moistened the back of the paper with his tongue, then glued the ticket onto the bureau.

Erland winced and again turned to his mother. She stood motionless, her strangely bright eyes riveted on the white ticket.

Erland trembled when the appraiser stuck another ticket onto the wall clock. He remembered how many Saturdays he had dusted that clock when helping his mother with the week-end cleaning. With a soft rag he used to polish every one of the numerous carvings that embellished the framework. He stared at the ticket. How would he ever get the glue off without spoiling the polish? But then he remembered they were taking the clock away to sell it at auction together with all their other things. A scream flew up in his throat. But he fought it back.

Hanna glanced at him. "Go out into the kitchen," she said in a controlled voice.

He did not hear. He was watching the man gluing small white tickets to every piece of their furniture except the bed. "They are not allowed to take people's beds," he had heard a neighbor say to his mother. "They must leave them the beds."

Now the man put a ticket on the mirror. He stuck it in

the middle of the well-polished glass. He put one ticket on Hanna's sewing machine. Tickets everywhere. White small tickets glared at Erland wherever he looked. They danced before his eyes. . . .

Suddenly he cried out wildly and flung himself on the appraiser, beating him with his fists. The startled man drew back a step, warding off the boy. "What the hell is this?" he growled, and shoved his big hand over Erland's face.

"Erland! Erland!" cried Hanna. She ran and seized him by the shoulders.

He shook her off. His face was chalk-white, his breathing labored. Again with a snarl he flew at the man and dug his finger's into the other's throat where he hung, unheeding the blows at his face and breast.

"Jesus Kristus!" Hanna screamed. "Erland! Erland!"

He did not hear. "You! You! . . ." He shouted incoherent threats at the dazed man, whose face was no less white than his own. "Go away!—You—Our things! . . . You! You! . . ."

"Erland! Merciful God! What are you doing?" Hanna again tried to pull him away from the man. At last the appraiser got a hold on the frantic boy. He grabbed him by the wrists and held him vise-like.

The boy fought insanely, but all at once he collapsed. A sob wrenched his body and he fell back, his tears streaming. The man pushed him off. "Goddamn you!" he cursed and put his trembling hand to his throat where blood showed in several long scratches.

Erland dropped to the floor where he lay in a heap, his body shaking with sobs. Hanna stood over him wild-eyed, wringing her hands. She turned a half-hysterical gaze at the

man who had now stepped to the door. He looked down on the boy, then glanced around him at the room where the many white tickets glared back at him, violating the neatness and loving care extended to every smallest detail of the Hammar home.

He stood silent for a moment, his hand on the knob. Again he felt at his throat. He adjusted his clothes. Then he left without a word.

21

HE WAS hardly out of the house when the neighboring wives came running to ask Hanna what had happened. They had heard the noise and had seen the appraiser walk away in a flurry.

"Sit down, Fru Svensson," said Hanna and put on the coffee pot. She generally didn't like having gossipy women hindering her work but today was an exception. She was too upset to be able to do anything. "They took your furniture, too, last year, didn't they?" she asked Fru Svensson.

"Did they!" Fru Svensson replied, blowing on the hot coffee. "Come down an' have a look for yersel'. We ain't got more'n th' bed an' a coupl'a chairs an' th' rickety table Olof bought in a secon'-hand shop."

"Yah, yah," said Hanna. She knew. She had frequent occasions to visit the Svenssons in their flat below. For Fru Svensson invariably got drunk when existence became too lop-sided and everything crashed around her. At those times her two small children went without food and care. She wasn't quite sober now.

"Fru Svensson," said Hanna gravely. "You should go easy with the drink."

Fru Svensson's hand evened out her apron creases. Her wasted face seemed to grow longer and acquired a martyred look in the process. "I tell ye, Fru Hammar," she replied sadly, "it saves one's mind, it does. A body's got t'save one's mind, hasn't one?"

The door bell rang. Erland held on tight to the sofa. Was that the police coming to get him? He was sure they would arrest him for what he had done to the appraiser.

But it was only Fru Bergsson from upstairs, and he sighed with relief. Hanna put another cup on the table while Fru Bergsson went and had a look at the ticketed furniture. She came back into the kitchen and regarded Erland with admiration. "Upon my word!" she exclaimed. "And Erland chased him away, did he? Truly, I say, that's a son-in-law for me!"

Erland flushed scarlet. The others smiled. They well knew of Erland's liking for the twelve-year-old Anna.

Erland was thinking. So—he had chased the appraiser away, had he? Yah, that was one way of looking at it. But really, it was true, he had. If only the police wouldn't come and get him!

Nothing happened that afternoon. But next day was worse, because Hanna left home shortly after seven in the morning. She had two days of washing for a well-to-do family. When Peter had left and Nils and the girls had gone down to play in the yard Erland was alone in the house. He felt tense and nervous and trembled at every sound on the stairs. He spent hours at the living-room window, watching for the police.

At eleven o'clock someone pressed the bell. Erland backed

up against the wall and held his breath. He had bolted the door, and now he expected they would force it open and get him and put handcuffs on him.

But nothing more was heard. After a long tense wait he tiptoed out into the hall and listened. There was not a sound. The thought struck him that it might have been the mailman. He cautiously opened the door. No one was outside. He stepped out on the landing and looked in the letter box. Yes—a big business letter. He took it out and read the printed heading in the upper left-hand corner. "Bureau of Income Tax." Hot perspiration broke out over his body. He went back into the kitchen and stood with the letter in his hand, wondering what it said. He wouldn't know until the evening when his mother came home. But he was sure it was an order to have him arrested.

He spent the longest day he could ever remember. The letter was lying on the table. So now they would put him in prison. He would sit in a small square cell with the light trickling in from a little grated window high up in the thick stone wall. He would be a lonely prisoner, sitting there evenings while the twilight closed about him, and from outside the corridor would come the monotonous tramp of the guard. And sometimes his parents would come visiting and he would speak to them through the bars. He was to suffer because he had tried to save the family.

And Anna would come too. She would admire him and call him a hero and promise to wait for him all her life and never marry anyone else. And when he got out of prison he would be an old, broken man, pale after never having had any sunlight for all those years. . . .

He was interrupted by the tinkling of a bell down in the

yard and the sound of a cracked old-man's voice singing a hurdy-gurdy tune.

*"Ole busted rubbers
An' junk an' bones an' ra-aggs;
Yeah, all kinds o' ra-aggs.
An' broken clocks an' pans an' pots
An' linen, wool an' ba-aggs;
Yeah, linen, wool an' ba-aggs.
An' copper'n iron an' zinc an' tin,
An' all sorts o' bottles, both thick an' thin
Ra-aggs an' bones!
Ra-aggs an' bones!"*

The song was rounded off with an extra tinkle of the bell and followed by a short silence. Then there was a clatter of hob-nailed shoes against cobblestones as the rag-man left the yard. Erland knew him well. Johan Rag-man, he was called, an odd little fellow, timid and frail and with a lean sensitive poet's face and a long grey beard.

Erland again became conscious of the threatening letter on the table. If only he knew what it said. "Good God!" he prayed, "don't let 'em put me in prison, please!"

Upon this he seemed to hear a stern voice in his heart, asking: "Will you think kindly of the appraiser, then?"

Erland squirmed. He didn't answer. . . .

"Well—?" said the voice. "How will it be?"

Erland fidgeted and gulped. He had a picture of the man sticking his white tickets to the furniture, to the bureau, the wall clock. And one in the very center of the mirror!

"Forgive him," the voice urged. "Think well of him, and I'll let you go."

It was some time before Erland answered. But then—"Yah," he said in his heart. "I'll—I'll forgive him. . . ."

So now it was done. But he gnashed his teeth. Heavens alive, how he hated that man!

22

ERLAND was going round the house with a bottle of turpentine and a soft rag, removing the tickets from the furniture. He was a hero these days, for the letter from the tax collector had contained notice of a month's respite.

With renewed courage the Hammar family again went into battle. Maybe they could save their furniture after all. And one night Peter said to Hanna: "I spoke to the foreman. He said Volmer and I could work Sundays now; they have a big order for those silk tassels and balls that are in style."

Hanna nodded. She herself had arranged with two more families for their washing. And she had gotten a new job for Erland in a big grocery store where they needed an errand boy. She counted, she calculated and figured.

At any price the budget must now be balanced. And as a first measure Hanna ruthlessly cut down the household expenses. Butter was banished from the table. The morning oatmeal was eaten without milk; it had always been cooked in water. Only the very simplest foods came to the table, but

Hanna saw to it that they were strength-building and nourishing.

The children grumbled and protested. And one morning Britta broke out in open rebellion. She shoved her plate at arm's-length away from her and glared with distaste at the dark rye-meal porridge. "I don't like it!" she muttered, her eyes smoldering. "I hate it! I can't eat it!"

"You'll eat it," said Hanna. "That's all you'll have until dinner. We haven't one öre in the house."

"But I can't swallow it," Britta objected. And now she began to cry. "Mother—I'll run down to the store and get some rolls—and a little butter. We can pay for it on Friday."

"No, I should say not! You eat your porridge and that settles it! Buying on credit! Indeed! You think we've come to that? Not we. And I might as well tell you we'll have salt herring for dinner."

But in spite of these extra hardships a hopeful feeling had again entered the home. And on the following Sunday night, when all work was done for the day, Peter and Hanna sat in the twilight with the children, singing and telling stories.

First Peter recounted some of the adventures that befell him when, as a young journeyman, he had travelled through Germany and France, a knapsack slung on his back. And he described for the spellbound children the famous old clock in the Strasbourg cathedral—the moving figures, the rotating globe and the planetarium. It was a marvelous clock!

Ay, Peter smiled to himself as he watched the eager faces around him. But he had better stories up his sleeve, only they were not exactly fit for the children. For example, wouldn't Erland screw up his eyes if told that when Peter was his age he had run away from home and tramped the roads and

ventured forth among strange people on high adventure! Ay, but if he ever should tell that story Peter knew he would leave out the last part of it, about when he returned home after having been away for almost a year and his father nearly thrashed the life out of him with a leather strap.

"But now," said Hanna, "I want to tell a tale. And it's a true one too, have faith in my words."

Peter seemed a little put out. "Hm-m-m," he cleared his throat. Did she imply his stories weren't true, or what?

"I heard this story when I was little," said Hanna. "I . . ."

Peter gave a contemptuous sniff. Huh!—one of those Småland stories! And she called them true! He slumped down in his chair and made himself comfortable. If it was a Småland story she was going to tell then he didn't fear the competition much, at least not as far as truth was concerned. Those people in that black God-forsaken rocky province of Småland! The way they raved and talked one would think the Devil and his sulphurous escort actually did pop up to Earth on dark nights to beguile and snare human beings.—Bosh! 'Twas all superstition and fairly tales.

" . . . One evening a young woman, the wife of a poor crofter, was on her way home from the fields. She carried an apron full of carrots and beets and other vegetables. . . ."

Hanna had begun her story. Her strong beautiful face took on an aspect of dreamy gentleness, and she gazed absently before her as if she were thinking of herself back in barren Småland again, a little bare-legged girl running with fluttering heart across the ghost-haunted moor in the on-coming evening twilight.

" . . . It was getting dark. Suddenly on the path before her she saw a man. She was surprised, because she had not

seen him coming. He looked rather queer, she thought. He had pulled his cap down over his eyes and he walked in a strange, limping manner.

“‘Good evening,’ he said and bowed deeply, but he didn’t take off his cap. ‘How are you, if I may be so bold as to ask?’

“‘A civil question is no offense,’ the woman replied. ‘My health is good, and may God give you the same great gift.’

“At this the queer-looking fellow jumped and gave a loud moan. ‘Please don’t say that,’ he gasped.

“The woman stared at him. ‘You are strange, I must say. Never did I hear anyone object to such a well-meant wish. I don’t think I’ve seen you before. Do you live very far off?’

“‘Rather,’ he said. He limped along at the woman’s side in the twilight, turning his face away. ‘Yes, I’ve been travelling a good deal in my days and I know many a pretty trick.’ He sighed. ‘Would you like to be rich?’

“The woman stopped in the middle of the path. ‘Don’t make me angry,’ she frowned. ‘You may have seen more of the world than I have, but even so you’ve no right to make fun of me.’

“‘I’m not making fun,’ he said with another one of his curious sighs. ‘Didn’t I tell you I know many a pretty trick?’

“‘Why wouldn’t I like to be rich?’ the woman muttered. ‘I and my poor husband—are we doing anything but slaving and toiling from morning till night, and hardly enough bread to eat?’

“‘I’ll make you rich,’ said the fellow and shuffled on his limping feet. ‘You give me what you’re carrying and you shall have plenty of everything all your life.’

“The woman laughed and looked at the vegetables she

carried in her apron. 'Oh!—if you're satisfied with that, take it and be welcome.'

"'On your word?' he asked eagerly, glancing at her sideways.

"'I swear,' she said. And now she laughed out loud.

"'Good, good!' he chuckled. And he couldn't stand still, he was so delighted. He shuffled and he bowed and he rubbed his hands. And now the woman noticed he had on woollen mittens although it was in the middle of summer.

"'I'll come for it in fifteen years,' said the fellow. 'I'm much obliged.' Then he disappeared right before the woman's eyes. . . ."

"'Oh!' Little dreamy-eyed Vanda gave an involuntary gasp. Her soft blond curls fell over her face as she sat tensely leaning forward, listening to mother's tale.

"'Yah,' said Hanna. "He disappeared just like that." She brushed a strand of hair away from her brow and looked around her. Little Nils' blue eyes shone with an absorbed expression. Clearly he was right there on the lonely moor in the half-light with the limping fellow vanishing out of the woman's sight.

"'Yah,' Hanna went on with her tale, "now she understood it was the Evil One she had spoken to, but what he wanted with her vegetables in fifteen years she couldn't make out. For she didn't know she carried a child under her heart.

"When she found that out she almost died from fright, for she knew very well what she had promised the Devil. She wept and went to the minister and told him all that had happened. 'What shall I do?' she cried. 'Unhappy mother I am, having sold my own child to the Powers of Darkness!'

"'There's nothing we can do now,' said the minister. 'We

must wait till the child has its fifteenth birthday. Then we'll see.'

"Some time thereafter the woman gave birth to a boy, and a fine child it was. 'He surely knew what he was getting,' the mother muttered, angry at the way she had been fooled. But she had to admit the Devil was keeping his word, for wasn't it just wonderful how all good things began to come the way of her and her husband.

"Yah, and so time went on. And the years passed. And at last it neared the boy's fifteenth birthday. The poor parents were utterly beside themselves with anguish and fear. They wept and they prayed and all the people in the village gathered in the church and kneeled and begged God to spare the boy. For, you see, they all loved him. He was always polite and answered people civilly and never told a lie."

Again Hanna paused. The children uttered not a sound but sat in rapt attention, their eyes riveted on their mother's face while they waited for the continuation of a tale they knew by heart. But the old story became ever new by reason of slight variations Hanna introduced in the narrative and which fascinated the children who were instantly aware of every departure from the standard version.

"But," the tale was resumed, "the minister knew how to save the boy. On the night before his birthday he took him to the church and led him inside the altar ring. Because there the Devil had no power over the boy. 'You stay here,' the minister said, 'and never you move until I arrive in the morning and say: 'Come, my child, in the name of Jesus Kristus!'

"The boy promised he would do that, and so the minister went. All was quiet for a while. The minister had left a candle burning so that the boy would have some light. But

presently he heard his mother calling him from outside the church. 'Come out!' she cried. 'There's no danger now! Come out!'

"The boy began climbing over the railing, but then he remembered the minister's words and went back inside the altar ring again. 'If mother wants me she can come in here,' he thought. 'Why—it might not be mother at all. *Twee!*' he snorted disgustedly. 'Twee! you Evil One! You won't get me!' . . ."

"Oh!—how dared he! I would have died!" little Vanda exclaimed as she sat there huddled up close to her mother. She was quite pale with excitement.

But Britta giggled. A glittering light danced in her eyes. Her legs twitched and she jerked her thumbs. "Go on, mother," she urged. "I like it!"

"You added that about him saying *twee*," Erland remarked. "You didn't have that in the last time."

"Yah—hm," said Hanna. "When he said *twee* like that a terrible noise began. He heard shrieks and howls and thunder. Blue flames popped and flickered in the air. The boy thought his last moment had come, he was so frightened. But he didn't leave the altar ring.

"Suddenly he heard a dreadful tearing and crunching behind him, high above his head. And when he looked up he saw the big altar picture falling down on him. He cried out in terror and hunched his shoulders, but the picture never touched him at all. It didn't even fall. It was only a trick of the Devil, who was trying to scare the boy out of the altar ring.

"After that everything became quiet again. It was peaceful and still both inside the church and without. The moonlight

fell through the windows. The boy breathed with relief and thought the Devil had now given him up. . . .”

Hanna interrupted herself and turned to Peter who sat nodding on his chair. “Are you tired, Peter?” she asked.

“Oh, no!” He jerked up his head. “I’m listening. . . .” And to prove he had not been napping he added. “Now it’s about him coming in, saying Jesse Crist.”

“Yah—” Hanna glanced at the children. Marta sat like a statue. She had not moved once.

“Yah, yah. When the clock struck twelve up in the tower the boy saw someone looking just like the minister coming up the aisle and stopping before the altar ring. And the man put his head a little to one side and made himself sound really sweet. ‘Come, my child,’ he lisped. ‘Come in the name of Jesse Crist.’ For, you understand, the Devil can’t pronounce God’s sacred name. And this was just another one of his wily tricks.

“But the boy understood and didn’t move a whit. Then the Devil lost his temper. He tore around in the moonlight and jumped and shook his fists at the boy, and one of his shoes fell off, and there, trust what I say, didn’t the boy see his goat foot! And his trousers cracked in the seat and a long ugly tail sprang out and switched about and—and—Britta, stop giggling like that, otherwise I can’t finish the story! And—yah—at last he ran out of the church, limping on his goat foot, with blue flames dancing around him. And there was a terrible smell of sulphur in the air. . . .”

“Like those Russian fire-crackers,” little Nils reflected aloud.

“Keep quiet!” Britta frowned on him and gave him a push. “You spoil the whole thing!”

“. . . But in the early morning the minister came into the

church. He walked up to the altar ring and said: 'Come, my child, in the name of Jesus Kristus.'

"The boy went out to him. And now he was saved and the Devil had no more claim on him.—Yah.—Oh, I forgot. But when the boy thought the altar picture was falling down on him, you remember, then he crouched and hunched his shoulders. Yah, and his back always remained a little twisted after that!"

Her story was finished. "Now look at father," she said and smiled. "He's fast asleep."

"I'm not," Peter protested, laboriously screwing up his eyes. He yawned and he stretched himself. "Are you going to tell any more stories—from Småland?"

"No," said Hanna. The far-away look in her eyes was gone. She rose. "We'll have to go to bed now. I must be up at five tomorrow morning because I promised Fru Rydberg I would be there not later than seven. They have a big wash."

"Yah—hm," said Peter. "We had better go to bed, I guess. 'Twas a good story, wasn't it?" he remarked to little Nils.

Nils nodded. His blue eyes blinked under his tumbling hair. Ay, and his heart was yearning for Småland!

23

HANNA had heard about the new job for Erland from the woman who scrubbed the floors in the grocery store. She lived in the same house as the Hammar family.

There was something strange about that woman which Erland couldn't get at. She never walked like other people but hurried along, looking at the ground, her shawl wrapped tight about her. Every time Erland saw her his imagination supplied a pursuer who was goading her on, invisible to other people. Erland had such foolish fancies. He was glad people couldn't read his thoughts.

And he didn't at all like the way the woman talked. If people once gave her a chance to speak she never let them off but gabbled away in a loose-jawed fashion that changed her looks to something slippery and wishy-washy, and she swung her arms as though they had come unhinged, and rolled her head and swayed her slim body, making one feel she hadn't a bone in her body.

Her name was Fru Lind. She had a little boy that was the poorest thing, sickly-looking and with thin hair and legs

like tooth picks. He was always ailing. People shook their heads. "No wonder," they said. "Father and daughter! Poor child. He's suffering for their sins."

Erland wondered. He asked his mother what sins they had done, but she regarded him sternly. "Don't bother your head about it," she snapped. "And don't listen to people. Fru Lind and her father have been very unhappy, and I want you to be polite to them and take off your cap and bow nicely whenever you meet them."

Hanna also said Fru Lind's husband was dead and that she now lived with her father, a shoemaker. He was a tall reticent man, very quiet and soft-spoken. He looked like a professor or something, Erland thought. He had dark, wavy hair and a flowing, well-trimmed beard.

When Erland had worked a few weeks in the store he noticed that the clerks began leering at him and were tittering and whispering between them. And then one of the other errand boys told him: "You're a bastard, you are!"

"You're a liar!" Erland flared up.

"Liar nothin'. Fru Lind knows yer old woman. She wus tellin' us yer ma wasn't never married to yer old man at all."

"You say that again and I'll. . . ."

"Yeah!—An' what'll ye do, eh? I'm stronger'n you are. Bastard!" He pushed his sneering face up close to Erland's.

They were standing in a back room. Just then the storeman came in, carrying a batch of burlap bags. "Whaddarye fightin' about?" he barked. "Shut up!" He was a stocky, cranky-looking man of fifty, always enveloped in a huge burlap apron reaching down to his feet. His cheeks were blue-red from the cold in the warehouse, and his nose merely a

small red lump underneath his stupid eyes. "What's the fuss about?" he growled and eyed Erland angrily.

Erland kept silent, but the other boy said, "Oh, I tol' him about his ole woman an' he didn't like it."

The store-man's face broke into a smug grin. He put down the bags, then went out again, his beefy bulk shaking with suppressed laughter inside the burlap apron.

When Erland told his mother about it Hanna only smiled and said, "Don't you worry, Erland. You were born just ten months after I had been married to your father."

And after a while she added: "Don't speak about it to anyone. Poor Fru Lind! She's not quite responsible."

But Erland thought it easy enough for his mother to say let things go. She, for example, didn't have to turn the coffee roaster. This apparatus was a great big thing installed in the warehouse loft. The store-man was in charge of the roasting, and he put Erland to turn the crank which made the huge tin drum revolve over a gas range. Inside the drum was the coffee and one had to keep turning without a stop otherwise the beans got burned.

Every morning a fresh batch was roasted. The drum was kept going from eight in the morning until eleven or twelve. Before Fru Lind began gossiping the store-man used to come and relieve Erland for a few minutes at about ten o'clock, but now he never showed up at all except when he wanted to test the coffee.

Ay, but a boy needs a few minutes privacy once in a while, and as Erland didn't get that he at times felt like screaming. And he didn't dare stop turning the crank even for a second for fear he might burn the coffee.

Then he solved his problem in a simple manner. Before he

went up to the roaster he put in his pocket a medium-sized bottle. For with an effort, and for the space of about half a minute, he was able to turn the crank with one single hand.

The store-man peered suspiciously at him when he came to test the coffee and found it was all right. "You stopped the crank!" he growled one morning and sniffed the handful of coffee he put to his red lump of a nose.

"I didn't!" Erland protested.

"Shut up, you!" the store-man returned furiously, his face getting crimson. "I won't have ye talkin' back t'me. Not you!" He flung the coffee back into the drum, and after another glare at Erland he went away again.

All kinds of thoughts floated into Erland's mind during the long hours he turned the crank. He reflected sadly that his parents had seemed to be bad friends of late. He wondered why. "Couldn't you have been careful!" Peter had said to Hanna one evening, looking very angry.

"*You* are telling me that?" she asked quizzically.

Peter had thrown away the paper he was reading. He rose from the chair, and cleared his throat in his most ominous manner. "Hm—I thought five was enough," he muttered. And without another word he stepped into the other room and went to bed.

Erland saw his mother's face change when Peter had left the kitchen. She bit her lip and looked very sad as she stood ironing the family laundry.

"What's happened, mother?" he asked gloomily.

"Nothing," she said. After a while she added. "Don't you think you could ask for a raise now? One krona more. You've been there four months already."

"Aw—they won't give it to me," he answered. "I'm afraid to ask."

"Well, then I'll do it. Five kronor isn't enough, considering all the shoes you're wearing out. And you never get home before eleven at night."

"No, mother! Please!" Erland got panicky. Even now as he stood here turning the crank he felt his back perspire at the very thought of his mother coming to the store and demanding a raise for him. Oh, but he wished he was dead!

He listened to the coffee beans rustling inside the drum. 'Twas a monotonous and slow job, this turning the crank. Round, round, all the time. His eyes roved about the cobwebby loft. There were no windows, only an opening in the wall with a protruding cantilever beam and tackle with which to hoist up the coffee sacks. He wondered what people would say if he jumped out through that opening and killed himself. Then they might be sorry they had ill-treated him.

He tried to calculate how many beans there were in the drum. Perhaps a million? He wished he had one öre for each bean. Or better one krona. Then he would buy a house in the country for his parents, and his mother wouldn't have to go around doing people's washing.

Round and round that drum. He was thinking, thinking. All sorts of ideas trickle into your mind when you stand in a loft like that, turning the crank of a coffee roaster.—There was that mystery about the Half-Man they showed in the vaudeville. Two years ago there had been a show in town; now they were here again, that's why he happened to think about it. Their posters made a big splash about the Half-Man. 'Twas the upper part of the head. He had no legs, but it was only a fake, Erland knew that. They did something with a

black velvet curtain which they hung back of the man who was sitting on a table.

The first time they were in town Erland had mentioned it to Little Aunt when he was visiting out where she and grandma lived in a small quaint house. The cobblestone street there was so narrow you could stand in the middle of it and touch the fences on either side with your hands.

Grandma had gone away on some errand and Erland and Little Aunt were out in the yard teasing the wise-looking and long-whiskered goat who tried to get at them with his horns. Erland spoke about the Half-Man. "Wonder how they do it?" he said. "You can't see his legs."

Little Aunt pondered for a minute. "Come, I'll show you," she said and ran into the house.

Erland followed. Little Aunt carefully closed the door. "I'll show you," she whispered. "But don't tell anyone." Her face was flushed. Now when she didn't have on the black hat her springy blond curls corkscrewed about her head.

She dropped on her knees before Erland and put her hands on his hips. She spread her fingers wide and moved her hands slowly down along his thighs, then inside his legs—up—under his stomach. She said not a word. Erland stood looking down curiously, watching her proceedings.—Was this the way they did it in the vaudeville? He wondered where Little Aunt had learnt it.—Funny! And now, if she succeeded, without velvet and all—then what would happen to his legs?

But in the midst of this interesting performance they were disturbed by the sound of footsteps on the gravel path outside.

"Mother's coming!" Little Aunt cried under her breath and jumped to her feet. She looked very flushed and warm and

had gotten quite short-winded trying to make Erland's legs disappear.

The door latch lifted with a click and grandma stepped into the low-ceilinged room. "But children—why are you not outside in the sun?" she asked.

"Ida was going to show me . . ." Erland began, but Little Aunt turned on him a terrifying scowl behind grandma's back.

"What did ye say?" asked grandma absently as she pottered about with something on the table.

"Oh, we were just playing," Little Aunt put in quickly. "Come, let's go out in the yard," she said to Erland. She took him by the arm and dragged him along with her.

"You stupid!" she hissed when they were alone. "If you tell anyone I'll kill you!"

"What . . . ?"

"About the Half-Man." She glared at him.

He stared back, puzzled. "Because you couldn't do it?" he asked. "They use black velvet in the vaudeville, though, a fellow told me."

Little Aunt's hare-lip pulled up above her white front teeth in a maddened frown. Then she coaxed a gentler expression to her face. She softened her voice. "I'll give you my big seashell if you promise you won't say anything," she whispered.

He promised. But Little Aunt turned her back on him and limped over to the wise-looking goat, where she sat down on a stone and sulked. Erland didn't dare follow her because he was afraid of the goat—Yah, people were so funny. Erland couldn't understand them. He wondered whether it was ten o'clock yet. He was so sick and tired of this rotten old coffee roaster. Round, round, all the time. He sighed. Now he had that pain between his shoulder-blades again. And although he

was alone he flushed with humiliation as he remembered the unfavorable criticism of the last poem he had sent to a daily paper; the notice had been printed in the letter-box section. "Pleasant enough for the closer family circle," it had said, "but hardly of interest to a wider public."

He hated those words: "Closer family circle." He hated the editor. And now consider the stupid poems one read in the papers. For example, the one where they likened the moon to a yellow cat crouched in a tree. Wasn't it idiotic! Why, there was no resemblance at all between the moon and a cat!

No—he himself had other ideas about the moon. Had he not watched it every night this Fall from the moment it appeared behind the black mass of the shoe factory and began its slow advance across the dark-blue sky. He thought the full moon was like a woman—a queen maybe, or at least a princess, especially when some gauzy clouds were trailing after her; it made one think of a train all made of lace and silver stars. How proud she looked—but how lonely—thus gliding onward along her deserted path! Erland dreamt he was a handsome Prince all dressed in blue velvet and with a glistening sword by his side. He stood on a cloud, carried high above the sleeping Earth to the side of her whom he adored.

He bent one knee and removed his white-plumed cap. "Proud Lady," he said humbly. "Thou Lovely One, let me follow Thee through these lonely realms!"

She smiled sadly and turned her lovely pale face toward him. "It cannot be," she murmured.

He remained silent, his head bent, while she departed and was lost among the clouds. Then he sprang up. And now there was thunder and lightning. All space trembled. And he battled his way alone among terrific storms.

24

THE tax was just about paid when Peter got an abscess in his right thumb and had to have it cut by a doctor. Now he went around with his arm in a sling and wouldn't be able to work for several days.

So Hanna had to revise her accounts and make allowance for the loss of a week's wages. "Good thing we have the health insurance," she sighed. "It's only twelve kronor, it's true, but that's at least something."

"Well—hm," said Peter, looking very thoughtful. "Do you know, Hanna—I wonder if we should bother them with a little thing like that? What do you say? Some day one might really need it and then we'll feel more justified."

Hanna said nothing. She just glanced once at Peter and then slapped another couple of figures onto the slip of paper where she kept her accounts. And so twelve more kronor were gone.

"At least you'll get some rest," she remarked, bent as always upon seeing gain in whatever happened. "After all, maybe it's a good thing. You really need a vacation."

"Yah—" Peter almost wore himself out in his efforts at resting. He became grumpy and touchy and not at all his usual kindly self. He had a sickly suspicion that in secret his family criticized him for loafing about and having it easy. And each day he became even more morose.

But worse things were coming. Suddenly the infection developed into blood poisoning, with a red vein running half-way up the arm. And now there was a confusion! "Jesus help us!" cried Hanna. Without a moment's delay she ran to the office of the health insurance and had Peter registered. And Peter had vegetable soup for dinner that day and the children ran and hid themselves in odd corners of the room and cried, because they had heard that when people got blood poisoning they died.

Peter himself was taken aback at this unexpected turn of things. But now at least they could see it was serious, and it served to show he was important.

As if further to emphasize Peter's value to his family, the red vein travelled on and reached the elbow. But at that point Erland decided to steel himself and ask for a raise. For in this crisis he felt responsibility weighing heavily upon him.

And so on Thursday he bowed to Herr Bjälke, the owner of the store. "I wonder," he said, "if I—hm—could I have a little raise, perhaps. . . ."

Great, masterful Bjälke looked down upon the blushing boy. "So!" he said quizzically, "you feel you're worth more pay, do you?"

Erland fidgeted and twirled his cap. He glanced up at the important man, then quickly transferred his gaze to the tip of his left shoe.

"Hm—m—m, we'll see what we can do."

"Thank you, sir! Thank you!" Erland bowed and hurriedly backed away.—Thank God 'twas done!

And oh, the way his hands were trembling on Friday night when he opened his pay envelope. He hardly dared to look. But, but—did his eyes deceive him? Wasn't there a five kronor bill and another bill marked one? Yah! They had given it to him! Holy Moses! What d'you say about that! . . .

He ran all the way home. People in the street looked after him and said, "That boy'll drop dead if he doesn't take a rest."

Ay, but Erland felt that stirring within him which defies mere physical fatigue. He was getting to be a man now! He was doing his bit. They thought he was entirely useless, did they? Ay, but now they'd see!

Upon approaching the house he slowed down and tried to catch his breath. It wouldn't do to let them know he had been running. He filled his lungs and took long deep breaths as he mounted the stairs. He mopped his face. Then he knocked at the door and entered, trying to look unconcerned. He hung his cap on the peg. "Good evening," he said. He waited a minute, then: "Here's the money, mother." He gave her the five kronor bill.

"Thanks, Erland. My, you look flushed! Have you been running?"

"Who—I? Oh, no!" He coughed. Hang it! So it did show, after all! Now he walked about the kitchen and looked very secretive, his hands behind his back as father had the habit of doing on important occasions.

"Erland—what's the matter with you tonight? You don't look yourself at all!"

"Oh, nothing." He waited a while longer, then without a word he put the one krona bill on the table.

"Erland—?"

"Yah, I asked for a raise."—Now there!

"Erland, that's wonderful!—Peter!" Hanna called into the living-room. "Come here and look, will you?"

Peter stepped into the kitchen, his hand swathed in bandages, his face utterly gloomy.

"What do you think of the boy?" Hanna exclaimed. "He's gotten a raise!—Six kronor!"

"He has!—Yah-ha, that's fine—hm. . . ." Peter's face brightened for a second. But then it darkened again and got gloomier than ever. Ay—there had been other Friday nights when he himself had come home with both wages and overtime and a pastry or something for each of the children. But now, of course, he was nothing. That's the way things go in this world! . . .

And the pain increased in his hand. The red vein advanced inexorably beyond the elbow. "Merciful God, help us!" Hanna prayed as she stood bent over the tub in Ankarström's draughty wash-house. "Lord protect us and hold Thy hand over us as Thou hast done in the past. I forgot to thank You for saving our furniture, but Lord forgive me and please make Peter's hand well again. Amen."

Now she felt strengthened and thought the Lord might not mind her swallowing the drop of brandy Ankarström's house-keeper offered at coffee time. For surely the Lord hath understanding with the poor and those that are cold and frozen, and didn't He himself turn water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana or wherever it was?

The red vein went as far as within an inch of the arm pit.

There it stopped. "And thank You, good Lord," Hanna prayed that night after she had gone to bed. "Thank You for Thou hast not turned Thy face away from us. And be with us all our days, please."

As for Peter, he picked up his courage again and swore a sacred oath he would make up for every öre lost. He would start working extra overtime, so he would—now that he was rested and all.

25

THAT winter Erland's job brought him notoriety. One evening as Peter was reading the newspaper he gave a sudden start. He read on for a few minutes, then handed Erland the paper. "Read this," he said and pointed to a short article.

Erland took the paper and to his amazement the article was about him and written by one Kata Dahlström. "She's in politics," said Peter. "She's famous."

Erland read and re-read the article. Sure! 'Twas true. A few days ago he had been lugging a lot of parcels and things the grocery store had sent him to take to a customer. It was a cold day with sleet and slush. He was frightened out of his wits because one of the big paper bags threatened to fall off the load he was carrying in his arms. And the bag contained flour, so that if it dropped to the street and burst then he would surely be done for! He glanced wildly around him, hoping someone would come and help him with the bag, but people just hurried along, watching the ground, anxious not to step splashing into the puddles.

Sweet Moses, he was getting tired! His arms just wouldn't

hold up any longer. If something didn't happen soon. . . . But at that very moment something did happen.

For a lady stepped up to him and lifted the flour bag off his load. "Little boy," she said, "tell me—how did you get that big bag on top of all the things you're carrying?"

"Oh—one of the clerks put it there." He gaped in astonishment at the lady holding the flour bag against her fine coat. But he felt wonderfully relieved that the bag was saved.

She nodded. "I thought so. When you had picked up as much as you could, then the clerk put that heavy bag on top of it all. Is that right?"

"Yah-ah—" He wondered why she asked him.

"Come—I'll carry it for you," the lady said, smiling. "Where do we go first?"

"And then I gave her the address," Erland told Peter and Hanna. "'Twas Rombel's restaurant. Gosh, I felt funny walking with her, she carrying that bag and everything. You should've seen th' way they stared at us when we got to Rombel's. And d'you know what she said? She says to Fru Rombel, 'Excuse me, madam, but don't you think I deserve a tip for carrying this heavy bag such a long way on a cold day like this?' That's what she said. My, th' way Fru Rombel looked at her when she held out her hand. And she had a white glove on. And Fru Rombel got all red in her face and she didn't know what to do. She thought maybe the lady was only joking. But she kept holding out her hand and she said, 'Fru Rombel, you don't know how much a frozen errand boy appreciates a little kindness.' Great Moses, I was afraid I'd burst out laughing. And then Fru Rombel gave her a twenty-five-öre piece and she didn't say a word. She was all red in the face, and the people giggled. And the lady gave the

twenty-five öre to me. When we came outside she asked for my name and about the store an' everything. She was wonderful!"

Later, when he was by himself, Erland read the article for the third time. Just to think he had gotten into the papers! Only one thing he didn't like about it and that was where the lady spoke of meeting "a frozen little red-nosed slip of a boy." He went and examined his face in the mirror.—Yah, the nose was a little red, one couldn't deny that. But not much. Just a wee bit at the very tip. He thought the lady might as well have left out that passage; it spoiled the article.

However, in the store things had taken a turn for the better. Fru Lind was again friends with his mother and now the store-man came and relieved him at the coffee roaster for a minute each morning. Erland was grateful, but he still kept the medium-sized bottle in his pocket. One never knew. Better not take any chances.

26

I DON'T know what's the matter with the boy," Hanna one day said to Peter. "He looks thin and poorly. Maybe we ought to try another doctor. I don't believe Erland is so good."

But old Fru Karlsson on the ground-floor thought she had better advice. She shook her head and worked her toothless, never-resting jaws. "Nay, nay. What can a doctor do? Nay, it's no business for a doctor, this. There's the Wise Woman in Sofielund. Fru Blom's her name. Hm Hm.—That's the one ye wanna see." She motioned Hanna to bend down to have something whispered in her ear. "Hm hm.—Yah. Just mention my name. Say I sent ye. God bless the boy! Why, he's a sight before the face of our Lord!"

Hanna had heated the coffee. "Take some of the sugar cake, Fru Karlsson. I made it myself and know what's in it.—So you think she's the one to see?"

"Just mention my name. It's the English sickness. What can a doctor do? They call it the rickets."

So next Saturday afternoon Hanna takes Erland along and

they knock at a door on which is a sign: "Fru Blom. Mid-wife." A young buxom woman comes to the door. She looks searchingly at them and says: "Yah-ah—?"

Erland bows. Hanna says, "How do you do." Then she lowers her voice, "Fru Karlsson in Flint Street sent us. It's about the boy here." Inwardly she is much disappointed because the woman looks so young and brisk; it's hard to imagine her being Wise.

"Come in," says the woman. She bends confidentially toward Hanna. "I'll speak to my mother. She's the one."

"Ah!" Hanna's face expresses relief. Her mother! Now, that sounds more like it. They sit down and wait. Erland is very nervous and keeps twiddling his cap until Hanna sharply tells him to stop it. He hasn't an idea what it is all about. His mother had mentioned a doctor, but now—this? He looks about him in the snug parlor crowded with bric-a-brac. The air is thick with a smell of cooking.

Now a door is pushed open, and from an adjoining room steps an old fat woman. She is short and squat. And her back is bent. Hanna feels comforted and reassured. Fru Blom, the healer! There is something occult and knowing about that beaked nose, and a doubt-silencing power in the crafty eyes that peer at them from under a pair of shaggy brows.

Hanna and Erland both get to their feet. "Fru Karlsson in Flint Street . . ." Hanna begins. But the Wise One already knows. "Yah—hm," she mutters. "It's the boy here—Yah. Come this way." And she takes them into another room.

"Let him take off his clothes," she says. She brings a ball of grey woollen yarn and a measuring tape.

So Erland unbuttons his blouse. He also removes his shirt.

His face is very red and as he is pulling off his pants he casts an imploring glance at his mother.

"He may keep his under-drawers on," says the Wise One. And through Erland's mind flashes a thought: "Now look! How did she know that?"

But the wise Fru Blom waddles up to him and lets her small, certain hand travel appraisingly over his body, lingering here to feel and to press, stopping there, tapping a bone, poking her thumb under his shoulder-blades, digging it in between his ribs. Erland quite likes her touch; she has a warm, good hand.

"Hm, hm," says the Wise One. "Yah, yah!" She gets her tape and begins to measure Erland's length. "Stretch out yer arms," she says, and Erland stands cross-like while being measured from finger-tip to finger-tip. "Hm, hm!" mutters the healer, and by the sound of it one may be sure there's a whole lot wrong. Erland looks at his mother, who sits with her hands folded in her lap while she watches the proceedings. She is very serious-faced, her brows contracted.

"Now, straddle yer legs," says the Wise One and measures him from hip to toe. After a glance at the tape she cranes her neck forward and peers into his face. It's a long, searching gaze. He feels it plumbing his innermost soul.

She is again feeling his bones. She mutters and shakes her head. "Yah," she says. "Hm, hm. His arms are three inches too long. It's the joints. His legs are pretty bad too." She ponders deeply, her lower lip protruding, her nose beaked with ancient wisdom.

Erland squirms. He shifts uneasily on his bare feet as he stands there in his long woollen drawers. Hanna's gaze is glued to the inscrutable face of wise Fru Blom.—"Three

inches!" she thinks, appalled. Lands alive, that's a lot, and maybe she'll charge more'n two kronor now!"

"Have ye been seeing a doctor?" the Wise One suddenly shoots at Hanna.

Now there! Erland marvels. She knew that too!

Hanna is visibly uneasy. She would rather not have admitted the truth but what's the use trying to hide things from One Who Knows. "Yah," she confesses, trying by means of both voice and gesture to make the whole thing appear a most trivial matter. "We did go to one—just to see what he would say like—hm. . . ."

"Hm, hm!" The Wise One nods to herself. Her lip curls sarcastically. "Yah, yah," she sighs at the hopelessness of it all. "Ha!" she scowls. "By right I should send ye back home again!"

Hanna loses her color. "No, no Fru Blom!" she stammers. "Fru Blom—please! I assure you 'twas nothing at all—we. . . ."

"Yah—for the boy's sake maybe I'll help ye. But I haven't much of a mind to't."

"Thank you, Fru Blom! Thank you!"

Now Fru Blom cuts off a piece of the woollen yarn. She anoints it with something from a red bottle, then pulls up Erland's drawers and winds the yarn round his left leg just below the knee. She says: "Whatever ye do don't take off that yarn! Now we'll go according to the moon. I want ye t'come back on a Monday—the first Monday under the new moon, that is."

So Erland pulls down his drawers again, warily, lest he dislocate the woollen string. While he is dressing, the Wise One speaks to his mother; she is holding a bottle of some

grey stuff in her hand. "Rub this on his joints an' shoulder-blades every night before he goes to bed," she says. "Rub it on well an' massage a little."

"Yah." Hanna promises she will. She has her purse ready.

"An' I want ye to give him a glass o' this wine each morning," the healer continues. "Shake it well 'cause I've put iron filings in it. That'll strengthen him an' make his blood pure."

"Yah-ha—" Hanna is fumbling with her purse. "And then—how much do we owe you, Fru Blom?"

"That'll be five kronor," says Fru Blom in a tone surprisingly business-like for one as wise as she. "One krona for the ointment, two for the wine an' two for the visit."

"Yah—hm." The corners of Hanna's mouth drop but she jerks them back up into place again. "Yah, yah, Fru Blom," she says, her smile not much cramped. "Yah, hm—I hope he'll be well now."

The Wise One keeps a dignified silence. "Ack!" Hanna thinks alarmed. "I shouldn't have said that. Maybe she feels hurt."

Fru Blom puts her hand on Erland's arm as he is about to follow his mother out. "Have ye got a sled?" she asks, bending her face close to his.

"Yah-ah. . . ."

"Good—I want ye to do a lot o' sleigh-riding between now an' the next time I see ye."

"Yah-ah."

Then they went. Hanna was very silent on their way home as they trudged through the snow.

"What are you thinking of, mother?" Erland asked.

"Don't speak!" she snapped impatiently. "I was doing some

figuring. Now I got all confused and have to start it over again."

He sighed wistfully. He noticed, dissatisfied, that his mother was getting very fat, but not in the face; that was drawn and thin. He didn't like his mother looking like that. He remembered when she was slender. She was beautiful then.

He sighed again and looked at his arms. Truly, they were kind of funny! Three inches too long, the Wise One had said. He wondered—would they ever shrink?

27

ON SUNDAY mornings Peter rose as early as five o'clock. For he had much to do. First he shaved. Then he trimmed the small hairs in his nostrils and also those which he thought disfigured his ears. After that followed the ritual of the Seven Waters.

The oil-stove had a busy time. The first water heated, Peter dipped a towel in it, applied soap and rubbed his entire body. While the second water was being heated he held the towel under the faucet and had a cold rubbing down. The third water was for a general washing of his face, the fourth for a gargle, the fifth for his nose—the interior. And the two remaining waters were both cold, two icy plunges of his entire head, accompanied with a great deal of snorting and blowing.

He rubbed himself down with a fresh towel, twirled his moustache and brushed his hair. Then he stood back before the mirror, scrutinizing his image. He turned his head this way and that. He stroked his smooth-shaven chin.—So there. Now he put the coffee pot on the stove.

Erland's bed stood in the kitchen, but he was supposed to

be asleep and unaware of Peter's proceedings. Between his twitching eye-lashes he saw his father step stealthily out into the hall. Peter was having some mysterious business in the clothes closet, then he came back into the kitchen on tiptoe, bringing with him a bag of cakes which he divided on three plates.

Now the coffee was boiling, its good appetizing smell filling the kitchen. Peter put white napkins on the trays, and in the meantime he was singing:

"Calm lies the sea, and bright stars twinkle
Serenely on the night's dark blue.
My heart, be quiet, be still, be patient.
Shall peace not also come to you?
Shall peace not also come to you-u-u?"

Erland always heard his father sing that song on Sunday mornings while he pottered about in the kitchen. Now Peter brought the tray into the living-room. "Wake up, you lie-abeds!" he cried gaily. "Or don't you want any coffee?"

Ay, and now one should see Hanna getting her eyes open in a hurry. "Wonderful, Peter!" she exclaimed as she sat up in bed and received the tray. "And fresh cakes! My! Danish pastry!" She tasted the coffee. "Mm-mum-mum. Tell me, Peter, how do you get it to taste this way? It's wonderful! How many spoons do you put in?"

"Only nine," says Peter. "That's all. It's the way one brews it that counts."

"That's true! You must show me how."

"Hm." Peter steps lightly out to the kitchen and fetches another tray which he brings back into the living-room to

the children who are sleeping in a bed by themselves. He has to shake them good and hard to get them awake. With a moan they sit up and rub their eyes, still half dazed.

“Don’t spill on the blanket,” Hanna admonishes them. “And what do you say when you wake up and are given coffee in bed? Thanks, father.”

Peter is again back in the kitchen. He now starts to hum an old drinking song:

“—And bring forth into the tavern
Of the dusky Rhineland wine. . . .”

“Erland! Here’s coffee for you!” Peter is standing beside the bed with the last tray. “You’re sleeping hard, you are!” he grins, seeing how laboriously Erland is trying to get his eyes open.

“Yah-ah.” Erland manfully subdues a smile. “What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock. How will it be?—Are we going for a walk, or no?”

“Yah. Oh, yah! Of course!” They always go for a walk on Sunday mornings. It’s only that Erland feels a little drowsy, but once he is up he gets into his clothes in no time. No seven waters for him, thanks. A little wetting of his face will do.

“I’ll have dinner ready by two o’clock,” says Hanna as they are ready to go. She lies back in bed, intending to take it easy for another half hour or so. It’s wonderful to lie like this, with no office cleaning to do or anything, just drowsing away like a fine lady.

It is still only half light when Peter and Erland get out on

the street. The snow crunches under their feet. A few sleepy stars twinkle above.

They walk in silence as far as the street corner. There they halt. "Shall we go to the shore or out to the country?" Peter asks.

"Let's make it the shore today, father."

"Perhaps so." They start going. An hour's walk takes them through the Sunday-still city and along snowy country roads to the shore of the Öresund, the narrow strait between Denmark and Sweden that links the Baltic with the Seven Seas.

The hoary old sea rolls steel-grey under brooding snow clouds. These are the storm-whipped waters where once dragon ships passed. The wind moans. Foam-sputtering breakers fall heavily upon the frozen shore.

"Ah!" Peter exclaims. He turns toward the sea and receives the cutting wind full in his face. "Ah!—The sea air is good!" He fills his lungs, then exhales the air with a puff. His face is red from the cold. "Inhale through your nose, Erland," he warns his son. "Keep your mouth closed."

Erland has buried his chin deep in the snug warmth of his up-turned overcoat collar and woollen muffler. His cap is pulled down over his ears. He is peering out over the stern sea and the grey-green combers tumbling upon the shore in ceaseless monotony, seething with salty spray.

Peter speaks. "Erland," he says, clearing his throat. "Hm—we must be very kind to mother now, and spare her all we can. . . ." A blast of wind carries away his voice and he interrupts himself, catching his breath. Then he goes on. "We should be very grateful to mother, Erland. . . . We couldn't keep our home together without her."

"Yah-ah." Erland finds it difficult to keep pace with his

father as they ramble on between banks of frozen seaweed and ice-covered rocks. They struggle on against the blast, without speaking. There is only the somber voice of the wind, the pounding of breakers, foam hissing, and the forlorn cries of sea gulls floating with outspread wings on the wind's current.

Peter halts. Prompted by a sudden impulse, he stealthily slips his hand around Erland's. "Promise me, Erland," he says, a vibrant tenderness in his voice—"not to turn against your father when you grow up—like so many boys do. . . ."

Erland never felt closer to his father than in this moment by the wintry sea. "Yah—" he replies, his voice effaced by the hard wind. Peter feels a shy pressure of his hand.

They stand thus in silence, gazing out over the tumbling breakers. The wind moans and sighs; the gulls cry out piercingly. It is to Erland as though a host of peaceless souls were roving above the icy waters, their anguished voices reaching him from out of the wind. . . .

They walk on again. A dull pain is invading the boy's breast. He can hardly breathe. Something enormous and heavy is weighing upon him. And doesn't he know he should settle down and earn some real money and be of help to his parents instead of drifting from one job to another the way he is doing? He is twelve years old now, and still only an errand boy.

Ay, things had gone bad in the grocery store. Fru Lind again got angry at his mother and so the store-man didn't come and relieve him at the coffee roaster. And worst of all, he found out about the medium-sized bottle, because he was spying. And he went and told everyone about it and made a terrible scandal. They all laughed and made fun of Erland,

so that at last he couldn't stand it any longer but had to go and find himself another job.

He now worked in a bookshop, but things weren't much better there. Hanna discovered blood on his pillow when one morning she came into the kitchen to waken him.

"What in the world is this?" she asked, and turned his head to the light, looking at his face. There were traces of blood in his nostrils and at the corners of his mouth. His forehead was bruised and raw.

"What's happened?" she asked, alarmed. She had been at the post-office, doing the cleaning, when Erland got home from work at about nine the previous night. And when she returned shortly after eleven he was already in bed, his head turned to the wall.

"Tell me, Erland!" she demanded again. "Did someone beat you?"

His face twitched. Suddenly he burst into tears. "It's the other boy in the store. . . ."

"Yah-ah?"

"He's a big tough from the Kirseberg Hills. When I was going home last night he jumped on my back and knocked me over and—and. . . ."

"Yah? And what had you been doing to him?"

"Nothing!" Erland flared up in the midst of his sobbing. He stared almost hatefully at his mother. "You always think it's my fault! I hadn't done a thing to him! He was jealous because the clerk said I ran my errands quickly."

"Hm—You may quit when you have gotten something else to do. There are plenty of jobs for errand boys. Now get up and let me wash off that blood."

—A seagull's shriek jerks him back to the present. He raises

his eyes and follows the flight of the bird carried by the moaning wind. She cries again, her white wings out-flung above the cold pounding sea.

Erland thinks: "Maybe she's sad. Perhaps she's longing for the spring. She can't be happy when the wind is so cold and the sea so icy and everything unfriendly and frozen."

His thoughts are interrupted by Peter. "Yah," he says, "I think maybe I'll have a little schnaps now." His voice has a tinge of apology. Turning slightly aside, he brings from his inside pocket a small hip flask in which he has measured out a good-sized schnaps. But just one. He throws his head back and quickly swallows the stuff. "Ugh! He makes a wry face, hinting there's really not much pleasure in it. "It does heat your insides though," he admits. "You're not cold, Erland, are you?"

"Just a little," Erland replies in a thin voice which comes, so it seems, from the depths of the woollen muffler.

He stoops down and picks from the ground a small pebble. "Look at this, father! How polished it is! Like an egg. Funny! How did it get that way?"

"The sea did that," says Peter. He takes the pebble in his hand, feeling its smooth surface. "The sea and the ice, Erland. You know, thousands of years ago the whole of Scandinavia was covered with ice. When it melted and the glaciers went crashing down the mountain sides they ground the rocks. And the sea washed and scoured the pieces. Like this pebble."

He hands the egg-shaped stone back to Erland who looks at it in silence, a tiny thing given its shape by the hoary old sea that was here thousands of years before he was born—before his father and grandfather were born—oh, perhaps before there were any people at all on Earth! But the sea

was mighty then as now. The sea played with the pebble, washing it along its sandy bottom, grinding, polishing, and making it smooth and perfectly egg-shaped. And when he was dead, his father, his mother—when they were all gone—then the pebble would remain, looking the same as now. It would hardly change, a plaything to the unchanging sea. . . .

He was again aware of the wind's moaning, the splash and thunder of breakers, the screams of the seagulls. He slipped his fingers into his father's hand, pretending he was stumbling over a rock. They had reached a place where the receding tide had left behind great pools of water, now frozen stretches with dead tangled seaweed.

"Let's go home, father," he said. But his voice was so low and shaken that Peter did not hear him in the blast of the wind.

28

ON COMING back home and entering the hall they were met by a nice rich smell of meat balls. Hanna stood by the oven in her Sunday dress and a snow-white apron.

And wasn't this warm kitchen a place to step into after the bitter cold outside! "Ah!" Peter rubbed his hands. Erland could hardly unbutton his coat, his fingers were so stiff.

"I hope you've a good appetite," Hanna said. "Because I've done my best with these meat balls. And we'll have fruit soup for dessert."

Peter and Erland exchanged meaningful glances. Did they have an appetite? Verily, what next!

They sat down to table. There was a second's hush during which Hanna's lips moved inaudibly. Then she bestirred herself. "You begin, Peter," she said.

"Yah." He poured out a schnaps for himself. "You take one, Hanna."

"Perhaps. . . . Seeing it's Sunday, maybe . . . hm. . . ."

Peter poured out a good full glass. There wasn't anything stingy about him. "How do you feel?" he asked concernedly.

"A little dizzy, sometimes," she replied. "But this'll brace

me up." She emptied the glass. "Brrr!" She grimaced. "Ugh, what stuff!"

"The meat balls are very good," said Peter.

"Hm. You don't think the gravy's too thick, do you?"

"No. Oh, no! The gravy's good."

"Here's salt and pepper. I didn't dare put in too much. Thought you had better salt it yourself."

She turned to the children. "Now, don't eat only meat! Land's sake! Here's bread. Don't be afraid of the potatoes. They won't bite you!"

After the meat balls came the fruit soup, cooked with prunes, raisins and dried fruits of all kinds—apples, pears and apricots.

"Good soup," Peter remarked. "It gives one strength."

Hanna saw to it that he got his share of prunes and other good things. "Yah," she agreed, in a tone implying she was doing her best. "I think this is the kind of food that builds you up. One has to have something real once in a while. Can't be too stingy with food. It doesn't pay."

After they had finished eating they were all so filled up that they hated to move.

"Now I've had too much," said Hanna. "I'm going to sit right here and see if the dishes won't wash themselves."

Erland met the eyes of his sister Marta, aged ten.—Ay, but they knew what mother was hinting at, surely. "I'll wash them," Erland offered weakly. "But you're going to wipe them," he challenged Marta, whose gloomy silence bespoke her aversion to dish-washing.

"You dry them," he said again.

"None o' your business!" came her sullen reply.

"Then I won't wash them!"

"Hm," said Peter and cleared his throat. "Be quiet. You'll

both help with the dishes. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, arguing like this after such a good dinner!"

Erland sent Marta a murderous glance. She had started it! He would get even with her later, don't worry!

"Thanks for the dinner, Hanna," said Peter, rising. "I think I'll go and lie down for a while." He went into the living-room, sat down on the sofa and removed his shoes. Then he took off his collar. Now he was free and easy in his shirt-sleeves. He sighed contentedly as he laid himself down and stretched out full length, a cushion under his head.

Hanna came in and covered him with a blanket.

"Won't you rest a little yourself?" Peter asked.

"Yah. I'll see. But first I'll make a sugar cake for the coffee." She lingers by the sofa. "Do you feel well now?"

"Yah, Hanna. The dinner was very good. After all, it's wonderful to have one's home."

She sits down on the edge of the sofa. "My legs ache," she explains. "The varicose veins are bothering me." She sighs. "In faith, one has to be thankful for having a roof over one's head and enough to eat. Now there's the Svenssons downstairs. God knows what'll happen to them! She came up while you and Erland were out and said they hadn't had a bite to eat for two days. She asked me if she could borrow fifty öre. So I gave it to her." Hanna throws a quick glance at Peter to see if he minds.

But no, he nods approval. "That's right, Hanna. It's well if one can help a little. How is Svensson making out?"

Hanna sadly shakes her head. "It's his lungs, the doctor said. He'll have to stay in bed, and if he doesn't get better they'll take him to the hospital."

Peter's face is grave. "And she—does she . . . I mean, does she behave?"

Hanna hesitated. "No, to tell the truth—I think she had taken a drop too much. But I won't say anything against her, Peter. One has to make allowance for people's weaknesses. Good God, one never knows what one would do oneself if one were in their clothes! At least we're healthy and can work."

Peter nods thoughtfully. As Hanna is about to rise he says: "Couldn't you send down a little of the fruit soup, Hanna? 'Twas very good soup. Might do Svensson good."

"Yah, yah!" She brightens. "I'm glad you said it. Maybe a meat ball too—and a couple of potatoes?"

"Yah, Hanna. Yah. Do what you think is right." He appears to rest more easily now.

The outside door opens. Hanna abruptly leaves Peter and steps quickly out into the hall where she meets Marta coming in from the stairs. She nudges the girl. "Sh-h-h!" She signals her to come into the kitchen. "What did they say?" she whispers.

"She sent a thousand thanks. And Svensson said: 'God bless your mother!'"

"I see. Good."

Hanna glances into the living-room. Peter has closed his eyes and pulled the blanket snugly up under his chin. He sighs once or twice—deep good sighs of well-being. It's nice and warm in the room. Presently there's a loud snore.

Hanna tiptoes to the door and closes it cautiously. "Don't go into the room and wake father," she whispers to the children. "He's asleep."

29

WHEN the dishes were done Erland sat down by the table with a copy book and a pencil before him. For now he intended to make a poem.

He opened the book. On the left-hand pages he had sketched little pictures and on each facing page was the corresponding poem. For he generally drew a picture embodying the central theme before he attempted to write. The drawings were amateurish and awkward, but while he sketched, ideas came to him, as if the motion of his hand started a stream of thought in his brain.

The picture he now drew was exceedingly difficult and he erased many times. He wanted to sketch a vast sea where mighty breakers were forever rolling onward, but he couldn't get the waves to look right at all. And in the foam-crested swells he tried to draw faces. He saw the whole thing very clearly in his mind—faces of children and eager young men and women borne high on the mounting seas, then combers which had run their course, and amidst their scattered foam the blurred half-distinct forms of old people.

He was still struggling with the drawing when he heard Marta tell mother that she had just met Anna Bergsson and her aunt on the stairs. They had been visiting Anna's parents and were now going home. Anna lived with her aunt outside the city; the aunt had no children of her own and wanted to help her sister who had five.

Erland's pencil came to a full stop and every thought of the poem vanished from his head.

He had been aware of Anna for a long time, but a week ago something had happened which disturbed him very much. Anna had come to borrow a cup of sugar for her mother, and Hanna bade her sit down and have some coffee with them, which she did.

"Anna, you're growing," Hanna said. "How old are you?—Twelve. My! A big girl." She patted the girl's leg. "Now look at those nice plump legs!"

Anna giggled and glanced askew at Erland who got blood-red in the face. He hated his mother for her comment, but couldn't help stealing a look at Anna's legs when she went upstairs. Her skirts swung gracefully above her knees. Yah, they were plump, her legs were. Her full, rounded calves tapered in a fine curve toward her ankles. And long after she had left he could easily recall her smooth cheek and her odd way of smiling. She had nice chestnut hair.

He fidgeted with his pencil. "I'll go out and do some sleigh-riding," he announced abruptly, closing his book with a bang and rising from the chair.

Hanna was surprised. "I thought you wanted to rest after your long hike with father!"

"I'm going out," he said. He dove into his overcoat and snatched his cap. His sled was standing in the hall. He

grabbed it and hustled down the stairs and out on the street just in time to catch a glimpse of Anna and her aunt disappearing around the corner.

Immediately he set out in the opposite direction—with no clear idea of what he would do, but merely following an inner prompting. He knew they would pass by the brewery at the cross-roads, and if he could get there in time he would meet them. He would just make it seem as though he had been sleigh-riding and was on his way home. “Oh!—how do you do?” he would say and bow to her aunt.

He ran at top speed, pulling the green sled after him. He would have to run away out through the suburb of Sofielund, across the railroad track and along a path leading to the main highway to Ystad, then to his right until he reached the brewery.

Beads of perspiration stood out on his face as he ran. His throat burned. A gang of boys threw snowballs at him and he felt there were stones inside, but he didn’t stop. He was glad the gates were not closed at the railroad track. He didn’t slacken his speed but ran on along the seemingly interminable path which at last took him to the highway.

Here he stopped, panting for breath. He pulled off his mittens and scooped from the road-side a handful of snow which he lapped up, trying to cool his burning throat. All the time he kept watching the road where they would be coming.—Or had they already passed! Was he too late? His heart sank.—No. They could not possibly have gotten here already. Good thing he had a chance to cool off a little.

While he stood there waiting, he felt his pulse going thump-thump, thump-thump. Moses, he’d made a fast run! His heart was pounding! He sat down on the sled, hoping it would help, but instantly got up again, feeling too nervous sitting down.

He thought he would eat some more snow—but—there . . . ! There they came! Anna and her aunt, two dark figures against the white snow. One a tall, slim woman. At her side a plump little girl.

His heart was just running crazy—a steam-hammer out of control. He shuffled distractedly on his feet and tugged at the sled string. He would have to calculate nicely when to start, so that the meeting would seem natural.—Now perhaps. He moved on, kicking playfully at the snow banks. A nice day! He was out sleigh-riding, he was. Having lots of fun! Heigh-ho! Tra-la-la! He threw himself down on the sled, gliding a few yards, then up again. What should he do now? He must do something. . . .

Now they were quite near. A fearful panic assailed him. Utter confusion. Dread. By the road-side was a low-lying field. He turned away from the highway and flung himself onto the sled and darted down the incline—a swift run over the white crisp snow, the evening air flowing back cool against his flushed face, the sled gliding far out into the middle of the field.

When it came to a stop he turned round and looked after the two figures up on the road. They hadn't noticed him. He breathed with relief and got to his feet. Slowly he pulled the sled after him up the embankment to the crest where he stood looking after the girl. Now he was sorry he hadn't stopped and said hello. Or at least how-do-you-do to the aunt. He felt a rush of strange yearning. Everything around him seemed unreal and still. But, of course, it was Sunday. An impalpable bluish twilight was descending over the road and the fields, a soft dusk that stole about the girl and her aunt, dropping gauzy veils between them and him and gradually hiding the girl from his sight as she walked away in the evening.

30

DARKNESS had gathered when he returned home and pulled the sled into the quiet yard. A pale light flowed out from the many windows and illuminated faintly the beech tree whose branches were sagging under a heavy load of snow. Erland carried his sled upstairs and put it in the hall. A smell of coffee came from the kitchen. Hanna had made the sugar cake; they had already been drinking coffee, but she warmed the pot for him.

Shortly after eight o'clock she wrapped her shawl around her. "I'll go to the post-office now," she said, "and do the cleaning." The office was kept open on Sunday forenoons and had to be cleaned for the following day.

"I'll go with you," said Erland, and closed his copy book with a sigh. He couldn't master that sea.

Hanna brightened. "You're a good boy, Erland. Between us we'll finish it in no time."

Peter bestirred himself on the sofa in the living-room. "What's that?" he asked sleepily. "Are you going to the post-office?"

"Yah," said Hanna. "Stay where you are, Peter. Erland

promised to come along and help me. It won't take us long."

"No, no—I'll come too." He sat up on the sofa, yawning and stretching himself. Then he put on his shoes.

So all three of them went together. The post-office was nearby; it consisted of four big rooms, vestibule, wash-room and a stairway. Erland snatched a broom and began to sweep the floors. After him came Peter with a wet rag at the end of another broom and did the mopping. Hanna went around dusting all the desks and shelves.

They worked on in silence. Erland ran and poured out the waste water each time his father had rinsed the rag. Three times Peter mopped the Public Room—people dragged in so much dirt with their shoes.

Erland carried all the door mats out in the yard where he shook the dust out of them. Hanna polished the brass scales on the postmaster's desk. Once a week, on Fridays, she did a thorough general cleaning, but 'twas unbelievable how quickly everything got soiled again.

Peter moved on into the letter carriers' room with his mop and bucket of water. Erland emptied the paper baskets. He swept the assistant postmaster's room. Then he swept the stairs.

"Some fresh water, Erland," said Peter.

"Yah, father." He hurriedly emptied the bucket and brought fresh water instead.

Hanna went into the wash-room and moved a soft rag over the mirror. She cleaned the washstand and put things in order. "The mat, Erland."

"Yah. Here."

Peter straightened his back and turned up his shirt-sleeves that were sliding down. "Fresh water, Erland."

"Yah." He darted away with the bucket and then returned with it refilled once more. Peter again started the mop.

Within an hour it was all done. Peter stepped into the Public Room and examined the floor closely. Now—think of that! He had mopped this floor three times and still one could discern some streaks here and there. "Erland," he said, "bring the bucket. I'll give it another once over and get it nice and clear."

Erland fetched the bucket and again Peter let loose with the mop. "Now there!" He stood back and gazed with satisfaction at the wet, shining tiles. "Looks nice now, doesn't it, Hanna?"

"Yah, that's fine." She went on a tour of inspection through the various rooms, making sure everything was in order. She stepped on tiptoe, careful not to leave any marks on the floors. Having satisfied herself that all outside doors were closed, she switched off the lights.

They put on their top-clothes and left. The night was cold. Myriads of white stars shone above. "Yah," said Peter, "another day is done." He sounded like one well satisfied with a finished task.

Hanna sighed a little. She looked tired. She said wistfully: "Who knows what tomorrow has in store for us?"

Erland wondered at his parents' contentment. Within himself there was always such unrest.—That drawing of his. He had it all clear in his mind, but when he tried to draw the faces amidst the foam they just looked silly.

He glanced secretly at his mother as they passed under a street lamp. Good Heavens, she was getting fat! Worse and worse every day! He hated her, looking like this. Why did she eat so much?

31

ON THE first Monday under the new moon Hanna again brings Erland to the wise Fru Blom. They go in the evening. And Peter comes along too, because he hasn't been feeling very well of late; he has been suffering from headaches and chills and feels strangely tired in the evenings.

As they arrive the Wise One gives Peter a searching glance. "Hm, hm," she says.

Peter looks very grave. He coughs once or twice, fingering his black bowler hat.

"Ah-ha, yah! Ye come with me," Fru Blom says to Erland. And turning to Hanna: "Ye come along too." She leads the way into her private room, leaving Peter to wait in the parlor.

The door closes behind them, Fru Blom scrutinizes Erland's face. She puckers her brow. "Hm, hm. Take off yer clothes!"

Erland does as he is told. When he has removed everything but his under-drawers he stands shuffling on his feet, plucking at the drawers.

"Ye may keep 'em on," says the Wise One, just like the last time.

She measures his arms and peers at the tape. "Ah-ha!" She nods triumphantly. "Gone back a whole inch, he has."

Erland feels wonderfully relieved. A heavy load drops from his chest. Only two inches more and he's perfect. And then—maybe he'll feel happier too. . . .

"Now we'll see," says the Wise One. She pulls up his drawers and removes the woollen yarn she had wound round his leg on the previous visit. Her lips muttering, she holds up the string before her crafty eyes. Her broad back is bent, her grizzly head thrust forward. She peers at the yarn as if she were seeing things invisible to ordinary eyes. Her lower lip protrudes sullenly. But her beaked nose is holding back.

She stoops down, puts the string on the floor and pulls it out full length. She straightens up and turns to Erland. "Now step over it," she instructs him. "And say:

I leave behind me disease and pain.
Health shall be mine in shine and rain."

Erland hitches up his drawers and steps over to the woollen string. His face is tinged with a slight flush as he cautiously plants his toes about an inch away from the yarn, standing with bare feet together. He casts a sidelong glance at his mother, then looks up at Fru Blom.

She nods approval. "Step over it."

He lifts his right foot, raising it high as if it meant stepping over a log.—

"I leave behind me disease and pain. . . ."

His voice sounds very thin in the silent room with his

mother and the healer watching.

He plants his foot far forward, then lifts his left, balancing on his right as he pronounces:

“Health shall be mine in shine and rain.”

Having put down the foot, he glances behind him to make sure he is clear of the string. Ay, he is! He is now on the side of everlasting health. He gazes curiously at the grey yarn. Wonder—is his illness inside it now, maybe?

As he stands there, undecided what to do and wriggling his toes, he watches the Wise One pick up the string and light a small wick lamp. She puts the string on a stick and burns it while mumbling some half-distinct magic words.

She nods cryptically and stares into the flame. “Hm hm—yah. Now, that’s done.” On turning round she shoots a glance into Hanna’s tense face. Her own is inscrutable. Hanna pulls herself up on the chair, expecting to be spoken to, but wise Fru Blom ignores her and waddles across the floor, fetching another string which she winds around Erland’s leg.

“Now come back when the moon is full,” she says to Hanna. “On a Friday this time. The second Friday under the full moon. That’ll take care o’ the second inch. Then when the moon’s waning we’ll bring the boy back to health altogether.—Now what’s the matter wi’ yer husband?” she snaps.

Hanna jumps. “He hasn’t been feeling well. He’s had chills and—and been feeling low and tired. . . .”

“Tired, eh?—Hm hm!—Ah-ha, we’ll see.” She turns to Erland. “You can dress now.”

“Yah—” He gets into his clothes with nervous haste and is then let out into the parlor.

The Wise One stands in the doorway, crooking a wizened

brown finger at Peter. "Ye come in now," she says, but when she has said it she remains there looking at him, watching his face, her own always inscrutable.

Peter scrambles to his feet, fumbling his bowler hat. Fru Blom's way of looking at him seems to make all his hidden ailments show in his lean face. He hurriedly crosses the floor and squeezes his gaunt form in between the door jamb and squat Fru Blom. "She's like a great big bug. It's as if father were walking into a trap," thinks Erland, frightened at his own irreverent fancy. He watches his father crossing the threshold, and for a moment the broad back of Fru Blom blocks the doorway. "Hm, hm," she mutters and pulls the door to. The lock clicks. And so Erland is alone in the parlor.

He sits twiddling his cap, his gaze flitting about the room. The woollen yarn itches his leg but he doesn't dare scratch it for fear of displacing the string. "Be careful," his mother had said. "You might spoil the whole thing if you touch the yarn. This is costing me lots of money."

He shifts restlessly on the chair, wondering whether his father is in his under-drawers now and if the healer is measuring him. It's great how she does it with a tiny little string!—The yarn itches him again. He feels he could tear it off and scratch the skin with both hands and dig his nails into the flesh, but instead he presses his right knee gently against the place where the yarn is wound about his leg. That helps a little. He studies his coat-sleeves. They'll be three inches too long now, he reflects, when his arms have shrunk.

And now he begins to think about the poem he brought to the editor of the *Arbetet* a few days ago. How he hates that sinking feeling he always has when he goes with a poem! The last time he went he paced the sidewalk for over an hour,

his hands clammy and wet, before he took courage to climb the stairs to the editorial office. Then he stood in the vestibule and looked at all the overcoats and hats that hung there. He thought there was something very forbidding and stern about them, and he was awed by a clicking typewriter and the sound of an occasional gruff voice.

Presently he heard footsteps from inside one of the small rooms and the door was flung open. His heart flew up in his throat. He spun around like a top and scrambled down the stairs and out on the street. He glanced behind him, then, having wiped his sweaty hands on his trousers, he brought the poem out of the brown envelope he had bought especially for the occasion. He read the verses over again, although he knew them by heart. Somehow he didn't find them as inspiring as they had seemed to him before he'd left home. Ay, he knew very well that some of the lines were cramped! But it was so darned difficult to get the rhymes in properly.

He sighed and put the poem back into the envelope, wondering what he should do—go back home, or what? He felt utterly miserable and torn by indecision. He fished out his handkerchief from his trouser-pocket and stood staring absently at the street traffic, the handkerchief rolled to a little damp ball in his hand.

But after a while he mustered courage and decided to walk straight in to the editor and hand him the poem. They couldn't kill him, could they? He walked briskly back to the building and climbed the first flight of stairs. Then he stopped and took a deep breath. His heart thumped fast and loudly. He could hear the clicking typewriter again.

Warily he proceeded up the second flight. If only the confounded stairs wouldn't creak so wretchedly! He put down his

feet gingerly, stepping near the wall where the creaking was less loud.

He stood in the vestibule again. He held his breath. He moistened his lips, then tiptoed to the door of the editor's office where he bent down and peered through the keyhole. He had a view of the shaggy-headed old man busy at a table flooded with manuscripts and clippings and sheets of paper of every description.

Erland drew back and took his position near the stairway. Great Moses, what should he do? Should he go in? After all, he didn't have to. The thought cheered him somewhat. But then—he would like to have his poem accepted. It was the only thing that really mattered to him. With a sudden recklessness he stepped to the editorial door and rapped. There! It was done. Now he had to go in.

"Come in!" barked a gruff voice.

His body stiffened. He snatched the envelope out of his pocket, opened the door and stood exposed to the full glare of the editor's piercing eyes.

He pulled the cap off his head and bowed. "Good morning. I—hm—I wonder—I have a poem. . . ." He shoved the cap under his arm and nervously tore the envelope open.

The editor received the poem without changing his pessimistic expression. He glanced at the sheet, then threw it among the litter on his desk. "Yah," he said. "We'll read it when we get time."

"Thank you. Hm. . . ." Erland bowed and backed to the door. "Should I—perhaps . . . come back?"

The editor was already immersed among his papers. "If you wish. In a week or two," he replied without looking up.

—Peter and Hanna are still in there with the Wise One.

Erland sighs deeply and again shifts restlessly on the chair.—Yah, that's the way they're treating him, the editor and everyone. He wriggles uneasily. The woollen yarn feels like a million needles pricking his leg.—But some day the editor will be glad to print his poems—and pay him handsomely too. Erland will then be a famous poet and the editor will offer him a chair when he comes. And, "No," Erland will say, brushing away some imaginary mote from his fine black coat. "No, Herr Editor, I won't sell this poem for less than a hundred kronor."

"Herr Hammar!" cries the editor. "One hundred! You're ruining me!"

"Sorry, but I won't sell it for less than that. When I was a little boy and was very poor you wouldn't help me at all or buy anything from me. Now it's my turn. You know you can't get such fine poems as mine anywhere else."

"I know, I know," the editor groans and goes to the safe and takes out the money and gives it to Erland. "And I hope you'll be back soon, Herr Hammar," he says.

—Erland twirls his cap between his fidgety hands. He wishes the healer would soon be done with his father. It's a long wait before the door is opened and Peter and Hanna appear, followed by the Wise One. Both of his parents look greatly excited, but no wonder. "I'm almost four inches out," Peter says to Erland on their way home. He brings out his handkerchief, and ay, isn't there a wee bit of pride in the way he is blowing his nose!

Hanna has bought another bottle of wine with good strong iron filings. "You'll soon be well again, Peter," she says with conviction. "Didn't she already take a whole inch off Erland?"

"Yah, yah. I believe she KNOWS."

The snow is falling. Hanna, Peter and Erland plod onward in silence through white drifts of the cold, crisp powder. A biting wind swirls it about and flings it stincingly against their faces.

Presently Erland says, "How nice and white the streets are!"

"Snow and winter are no friends of the poor," Peter replies. He has rammed his hands deep into his pockets and buried his chin in his up-turned collar. His grave eyes are peering ahead into the wind-driven snow.

They have a long way home. Hanna bundles herself up in her shawl. She hugs the precious bottle of wine to her side. Her face is peaked. She is plunged in thought as she trudges silently on, bucking against the wind.

"She is fat as a barrel now," Erland thinks. The cold is biting his ears. He rubs them numbly with his stiff red hands.

32

THAT evening Hanna and Peter went to the post-office early to do the cleaning. Erland and Marta went along too.

In the middle of the work Erland saw his mother totter and lean against a desk for support. Her face was pale. She put one hand over her eyes as if she were dizzy. She slumped down on a chair. "Peter!" she called in a faint voice. "Peter!—Oh, come!"

Peter came running with the dripping mop in his hand. On seeing Hanna swooning away he blanched. "What is it, Hanna?" he asked breathlessly. "Are you sick?"

"Yah, it's coming," she said weakly. "I didn't know it would be so soon. Bring me a glass of water, will you?" She leaned forward across the desk, her head drooping.

Peter ran for the water. "Here, Hanna! Here! Drink this." He put one arm about her waist to support her. She sipped the water as he put the glass to her lips. Erland felt numb with dread at seeing his mother sick like this. He and Marta were both standing huddled against the door jamb, looking nervously on.

"I'll have to go to the hospital as soon as we have finished the cleaning," Hanna was saying.

"Yah, yah, I'll go with you," said Peter. "Drink a little more water. How do you feel now?"

"I'll just sit for a few minutes till it passes," she said. After a while she added. "I wouldn't mind—if it wasn't for—for that other thing. . . ." She glanced at the two children to see whether they overheard her.

Peter looked worried. "Let's hope it will all turn out well," he said.

Marta began to cry where she stood beside Erland. Peter turned to them. "Children," he said, "we'll have to hurry up and finish the cleaning. Mother is sick. She'll have to go to the hospital tonight."

He bent over Hanna. "You think you can sit by yourself while I mop the floors?"

"Yah. I'll just rest a little, then I'll come and help you."

"No, Hanna, no. Please stay where you are now and rest yourself."

Peter and the children again turned to the cleaning, rushing the work. Hanna sat still, with her eyes closed. But soon she rose and walked slowly into the next room and began to dust the postmaster's desk.

"I'll do it, Hanna," Peter said anxiously. "You sit down and rest."

"It eased up a little," she replied and went on with the work.

When they got home Hanna put on her Sunday dress and her black coat. She went into the living-room and bent over the two smallest girls and little Nils who were asleep. Then she came back into the kitchen. "I would much rather have stayed home," she said to Peter, who tonight looked exception-

ally frail and thin. "But . . ." She lowered her voice so that Marta and Erland shouldn't hear. . . .

Peter nodded solemnly. "Yah, yah. I wish it was all over."

Hanna turned to the children. "Be good now and help father all you can. I'm going away for a few days—to the hospital. . . . Hm.—My legs are a little sore—you know, the varicose veins." She met Peter's eyes. Then she again turned to the children. "Don't cry, Marta. I'll be back soon." She averted her face and brushed her eyes. But then she braced up. "Yah, Peter. I'm ready." She managed to smile. "Bye-bye, children. I'll be back in a few days." They went. Peter took Hanna's arm. Erland and Marta stood looking after them. Their mother's face seemed very pale.

The hospital was just around the corner, and so Peter came back directly. "Yah, now mother has gone," he said. He took to pacing the floor. He glanced at the clock. It showed half past ten.

"You had better go to bed, children," he said. "I'll stay up. They might telephone for me to the grocery store." He dropped onto a chair and moved his hand across his face as was his habit when tired or worried. But the next instant he was up again and pacing the floor.

Marta went into the living-room and began to undress. Erland heard her weeping softly as he crept under the blanket on his kitchen sofa. The sheets were icy. He shivered. His body was tense and stiff. He felt as if he were surrounded by a vast hostile emptiness. A voice had suddenly gone out of their home. Mother had left a yawning chasm behind her.

Outside in the yard the wind sent a blast of snow against the windows. The kitchen seemed strangely bare and cold in

the pale gas-light. When Peter and Erland exchanged a few words they spoke almost like strangers.

The hours crept on slowly. Peter was still keeping watch on his chair. His head frequently dropped forward, and each time he pulled himself up straight and tried to blink the sleep from his eyes. Erland, too, napped a few times, but he was haunted by harassing dreams.

And then about half past twelve Peter jumped to his feet at the sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs. He ran to the door and met the messenger. There was a quick exchange of words. The feet pattered down the steps again and Peter came back into the kitchen, his face white.

Erland sat up straight in his bed. He clenched his hands from nervousness. "Father! What's happened?"

Peter flung on his overcoat. He cast a distracted glance at Erland. "Mother has had a baby!—A boy. But she . . . there's something wrong . . . something. . . . I'll have to run. . . ." He grabbed his hat, and the next moment Erland heard him running down the several flights of stairs. A door slammed from down below. And then silence.

Erland was sitting motionless in bed, his eyes dark with dread. Outside the window the snow fell noiselessly, the flakes giving off a brief glitter when they fluttered within range of the lamplight. Erland shivered. He felt cold and numb. A threatening shadow had fallen across their lives. What if mother should die! His throat lumped. He tried to pray, but all he could think of was, "Good God, make mother well again! Good God, make mother well again!"

He was still sitting thus when an hour later slow footsteps were heard on the stairs. They came to a stop outside the door and the lock was turned. Peter entered the kitchen. His

face was pale and drawn. Without removing his snowy top-clothes he sat down on a chair by the table and put his hands over his face.

“Father,” Erland whispered, his teeth chattering.

Peter did not seem to hear. The snow was melting on his hat and dripping drop by drop onto the table.

“Father. . . .” But then Erland felt the lump loosen in his throat and his tears came. He lay down and cried, digging his face deep into the pillow.

Peter moved on the chair. He turned toward Erland. “Mother’s very sick,” he said huskily.

33

ERLAND felt he had hardly closed his eyes when in the early morning he heard his father coming in from the stairs. Peter stepped lightly so as not to wake the children. His face was haggard. "Are you awake, Erland?" he asked. "I've just been down and called up the hospital. . . . Mother is still very sick. . . ."

Erland's tears came again. Peter stood silent, looking at the floor. He raised his head. The clock showed a quarter past six. It was still dark outside, but the snow had stopped.

"Yah. . . ." Peter drew his hand wearily across his face. "Perhaps you had better get up, Erland." After a moment he added, "Let us hope mother will get well. . . . We need her."

He again stood thinking. He looked very sad. Then he went and lit the oil-stove and put on the coffee pot. He stepped into the living-room. "Marta," he called softly. "Marta, I think it's best you get up now."

He came back into the kitchen and set the table for their breakfast. Erland was washing his face by the sink. Peering out through the frosty window he saw the faint bluish light

of dawn hovering over the white snow and the weighted boughs of the tree.

The house began to stir. Windows lighted up like sleepy eyes, fluttering till the gas lights were adjusted. Doors slammed; footsteps came tramping down stairs. Muddy voices were saying "Good morning" as people met in the yard on their way to work.

Marta came into the kitchen to wash herself. Her eyelids were red. She blinked in the sharp gas-light.

"What time is it you and Vanda have to be at school?" Peter asked her.

"Nine," she said.

"Nine.—Yah, will you wake Vanda at eight then, and heat the coffee for her and Britta and Nils. And when you get back from school there's food in the closet. See here—mother made some soup. You only have to heat it." He looked into the bread box. "And here's bread. When I get home tonight I'll make a real supper. We'll try and get along the best we can—till mother comes home again. . . ."

He drank a cup of coffee. Erland and Marta sat down to the table too. They drank some coffee but none of them touched the bread.

"Here, Erland," said Peter and pointed to a small parcel. "I have made some sandwiches for you since you cannot come home for dinner." He glanced at the clock. "I'll have to be going now." He rose and put on his overcoat. "Be careful with the fire, Marta. I'll ask Fru Bergsson to drop in and see how you're making out. Yah, good-bye. I won't be home later than six. Don't be downhearted now. I think maybe we'll have mother back home again . . . soon."

He left. And shortly after, Erland set out for his work. The

morning was raw and cold. Rugged figures of workers emerged from gates and doorways and plodded along the street through the snow. They walked stooping, huddled up, the men burying their chins in up-turned coat-collars, the women with shawls wrapped about their heads. Their faces looked wan in the bleak morning light.

Erland arrived at Kaufman's drapery store a few minutes early and stood waiting for the chief salesman to come and open up. The cold made his toes and finger-tips ache. His eyes were heavy. He felt he could doze off right where he stood.

The salesman soon came. "Good morning," Erland mumbled.

"Good morning." The young man glanced at the boy's face as he unlocked the door. "For Christ's sake!" he said. "What have you been doing to yourself? You look a sight!"

He entered the store. Erland followed him and stepped into a back room where he removed his cap and coat. Then he soaked a bucketful of sawdust with water and went out and sprinkled it on the floor. He got his broom and started sweeping, thinking how strange it was that here he busied himself sweeping this floor while his mother might be dying in the hospital.—He was sprinkling sawdust on a floor and sweeping it well out from all the nooks and corners, careful that every corner was clean and no sawdust left.—And in the meantime mother was very sick. . . . He interrupted his work and stood staring at the floor. . . . Why did he do this sweeping?—What did he care whether the corners were swept clean or not? What did it all mean to him? . . . And the sawdust . . . little grains of yellow sawdust . . . he was sweeping them up.—But why?—WHY?—Why did he do it? Almighty God! Was there any meaning in grains of sawdust when mother

would, perhaps, be taken away? . . . And more—he wondered about himself. Was this the way one should feel at a time like this? His pain was less great than during the night. Was he unfeeling and hard? Did he not love his mother as much as he ought to? Hot tears dimmed his eyes. A searing pain cut through his breast. He swallowed thickly. Suddenly, dropping the broom, he ran into the back room which was cluttered with discarded window dummies, packing cases and other junk. He stood in a corner and sobbed, leaning against the wall, his face buried in his arms.

Presently the idea occurred to him that God demanded a sacrifice from him. God wanted him to make some promise, and then he might spare mother. Erland almost thought he saw before him God's face as it regarded him sternly. And in his heart he heard a voice asking him: "Will you give up your poetry?"

In the dusty back room Erland waged a struggle with God. It was not easy for him to make the sacrifice God demanded, for it came to him with terrifying clearness that without his poetry life held no meaning; there was nothing to strive for, nothing he cared for. How could he endure watching a flaming sunset, or the restless sea, or the calm white stars at night—or anything whatever—if he wasn't allowed to write a poem about it? "But, perhaps I could still write stories?" he thought with some hope. "I might learn how to do that." It wasn't the same as poetry, of course, but at least it was something.

But God's answer came inexorably: "I want all that you love!"

Then Erland hardened his heart. He did not dare think out his thoughts, for God held His gaze fixed upon him, but he felt that God was cruel to ask for all that gave him joy.

But God knows even your innermost feelings, and His voice

thundered in Erland's heart: "Have you such small love for your mother who has been so good to you?"

And when Erland thought of his mother—how tired and sad she had looked when she went to the hospital last night, and that she now might die and he would never again hear her voice or look at her beautiful face—then the hot tears came rushing to his eyes once more. And he knew that mother was worth more than all the poetry in the world—and the stories too. And he spoke to God: "Please make mother well—and I'll give You my poetry—and the stories . . . if You want them."

Now he felt a little better and wiped his swollen eyes with his handkerchief. But when he turned round the first thing he saw was the stupid grin of a discarded old dummy. The wooden head was tilted to one side and the painted eyes regarded him with an idiotic stare.

"Erland!"—The salesman was calling him from the store. Erland dabbed quickly at his eyes and hurried out of the back room.—"Yah."

"What are you doing?" the salesman scolded. "Why, you haven't swept the floor yet!"

Erland averted his face as he silently went and got his broom.

But the salesman followed him. "What's the matter?" he insisted. "Are you crying? What's happened?"

"My mother's in the hospital," Erland mumbled. "She's sick."

"Well—" The salesman tried to make his voice sound sympathetic. "That's too bad! But—Jesus! You'll have to sweep the floor just the same!"

34

TO ERLAND the hours of that day dragged themselves on with feet of lead. He ran errands and helped in the store but all the time he was thinking of his mother.—Was she any better? Was she worse? Or—and his heart stopped beating—was she dead!

After an eternity twilight fell. It grew dark. The lights were turned on in the store. He was sent on another errand. The store closed.

He ran all the way home. Even on the stairs he heard little Nils crying. A sudden cramp wrenched at his heart. Merciful God! Was mother . . . ? Had she . . . ?

As he entered the kitchen his father stood in front of the oven, making pancakes. Peter turned around eagerly on hearing Erland coming. "Mother's feeling a little better," he said, a light in his eyes. "I called up the hospital."

"Oh!" Erland caught his breath. His tense face relaxed. He stood silent, gazing into the wall. . . .

"Perhaps you'll set the table," said Peter. "Then we'll have supper."

Erland pulled himself out of his thoughts. "Yah," he mumbled. "Yah. . . ." He began to sort out plates and knives and forks in an absent-minded fashion.

"Yah, I called them up," Peter continued, and his voice rang confident. "They said the worst is over.—Hm. It's empty with mother gone, isn't it?" he added, glancing up.

"Yah-ah," Erland replied. "It is."

Vanda and little Nils were both sitting on the sofa, crying bitterly. "But, children," said Peter, "mother is better. She'll soon be home, you'll see."

But that made slight difference to them. Mother was away—and now, wasn't that enough? She was sick. She was in a hospital. They gave loud moans at the very thought of it. Small, tender-hearted Vanda wept continuously and without restraint. She swallowed and she sobbed. Little Nils cried in spurts. Now and then he took a rest and sat dolefully staring at the floor, sniffing and blowing his nose, and then suddenly he broke out afresh into a heart-rending wail. In an effort to soothe his pain somewhat, Peter had given him two öre, and ordinarily that would have spelled two Russian fire-crackers for the boy. But today little Nils had turned his heart from all sorts of noise and violence. He recalled vividly how many times mother had forbidden him to buy fire-crackers—especially the Russian kind. And he gave a particularly desperate groan when recalling how often he had disobeyed her and gone to the cigar store on the sly. He would never do it again! Never! He pushed back the blond tangle of hair from his eyes. From now on he would do everything mother asked him—if only she would soon come back home again. And he would willingly run errands, even all the way to the dairy for father's buttermilk. And he would say his prayers every

night and not skip them as he sometimes did, just lying in bed with his hands folded, not thinking of God at all but about injuns and pioneers and things. . . .

Britta was restlessly striding up and down the floor. She jerked her legs; her face was hectic and flushed. So far, she was the only one of the stricken family who had given much thought to the new baby. Peter had said the stork brought it to mother.—Hm, yah! Britta gave a kick to the sofa and curled one arm behind her back. The stork! Huh! She had heard things from older children down in the yard. She had also been listening to a whispered conversation between two housewives. And she was not entirely blind; she had made her own observations of late. The stork! Huh! That cute long-legged bird!—But—for all that—she wouldn't mind having a look at the baby. The whole affair really made the newcomer more interesting.

“Now, children, let's eat,” said Peter, and turned from the oven. He was quite warm after his work there. Bringing with him a big platter of pancakes, he stepped to the table and put two cakes on each plate; then he poured some syrup over them.

The children took their seats. And after a short hush they began to eat. Only Vanda was still weeping, her tears trickling down onto the pancakes on her plate.

It was getting rather late and Peter anxiously looked at the clock. “When we've finished eating you and Nils go to bed,” he said to Britta. He turned to Erland and Marta. “We'll have to clean the post-office ourselves while mother is away. Perhaps you could go with us and help a little,” he said to Vanda. “You could dust the desks.”

Shortly after nine they went, Peter and the three children.

The night was cold and fine for sleigh-riding, and a crowd of youngsters were playing in the street. The snow had been shoveled away from the sidewalks and now formed a long high bank alongside each gutter.

Some sleds had bells that jingled merrily. The children were riding and sliding and throwing snowballs and having a good time. The light from the street lamps made the snow look very white.

A smallish, nondescript but kindly-faced man came tugging a sled on which sat a little six-year-old boy. On seeing Peter and the children the man hurried up to them. "Good evening, Hammar," he said. "How's th' wife gettin' along?"

"Good evening, Krok," Peter replied, for indeed the man with the rust-colored moustache was husband of the notorious Krok-woman. Peter halted. "She's somewhat better, thanks," he said, "I think she'll carry through."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Krok, and he looked as if he really meant it. "I s'pose you've a tough time with it now—Fru Hammar bein' away an' all?"

"Yah," Peter replied. "It's difficult, but we'll make it go." Beyond a word or two of greeting he seldom spoke to any of the neighbors, retiring as he was by nature. But he quite liked the smallish Krok. There was something frank and kindly about him, and anyone could see he was a devoted father. Little Erik was the apple of his eye. The Krok-woman, however, took a special pride in her two older children: Elsa was a good-looking girl of sixteen, but particularly the Krok-woman boasted of her Axel—my Axel, as she called him, a haughty-mannered stiff fellow of twenty who at present was touring the country as the assistant of a traveling photographer.

"Poor Fru Hammar! I sure hope she gets on her feet soon," said Krok warmly. "I'll give little Erik a couple o' rides up an' down th' street," he added, smiling. "Good night, Hammar."

"Good night, Krok." Peter and the children went on their way. As soon as they entered the post-office on the corner they started right in working. Peter doffed his coat and turned up his shirt-sleeves. He got bucket and mop from the storeroom. In the meantime Erland swept the first floor so that Peter could begin the mopping. Marta and Vanda went around and dusted. They worked in silence, only now and then speaking a word that pertained to the cleaning.

Presently Peter called them all into the room where the telephone hung. "Children," he said gravely. "I'll call up the hospital and ask about mother."

Such a hush came over them all. They crowded around the telephone and stood solemnly waiting while Peter turned the crank which made a shrill bell-signal. And then he put the receiver to his ear and asked for the number.

In a moment they heard a voice from the other end of the wire. Peter cleared his throat. "Hm.—This is Peter Hammar. Would you kindly tell me about my wife? Is she still a little better . . . maybe? . . . Yah . . . thank you . . ."

He quickly bent toward the children. "'Twas the night nurse," he whispered. "She is going to find out."

"Hm. . . ." He again turned to the telephone, pressing the receiver hard against his ear. The children were waiting. They made not a sound. Their faces were grave and tense. Marta clenched the dust rag in her hand. Erland held on to the broom.

Now they again heard the far-away voice and saw father's

face straining to attention. He was listening intently. Then his expression relaxed. "Oh, she does!" he exclaimed and his voice sounded relieved. "Thank you very much.—Thanks."

He hung up. His face was alight. "Children," he said. "The nurse said they have given mother some medicine. She is now resting comfortably."

When Peter had said that, something so wonderful came over the children.

RESTING COMFORTABLY

The two words seemed full of solemn meaning, like words spoken from the pulpit in church. They saw a picture of mother stretched on a white hospital bed, her eyes closed,

RESTING COMFORTABLY.

The green-shaded electric bulbs threw a bright light on the silent group that meditated on the message from the hospital. The freshly-mopped floor in the next room shone darkly. On the postmaster's desk the brass scales flashingly reflected the light.

Vanda said quietly: "Then mother will be well. . . ."

Peter nodded. "Yah, yah. . . ."

They stood for a while, thinking, then they reluctantly broke the spell and again turned to the cleaning. But they worked so much easier now.

For mother was resting comfortably.

35

YAH, and so Erland is working with a draper now. It's a great big store, centrally located. In the mornings he first sweeps the floors, then there is dusting to do and after that errands to run.

But on occasions when he is just hanging about in the store, having nothing much to put his hand to, and when the salesmen are occupied with customers, and when an old lady comes into the store wanting to buy a piece of cloth for a dress or anything like that—then Erland is allowed to step behind the counter and bow and ask what he can do for the lady.

She adjusts her glasses and peers curiously down upon the small grave-faced boy so eager to please. "A dress. . . ." She mumbles something about a dress—alpaca. . . .

"Alpaca!—Oh, yah, madam, we have some very fine. . . ." Erland clammers up a ladder and fetches down a whole stack of different fabrics which he piles on top of the counter before the customer.

"Here—" With a smart salesman's gesture he unfolds a yard

or so of the material. "Very fine quality, this, Frun*—with silk filling. . . ." He pats and strokes the shiny stuff with his hand, rubs it between his fingers. "Extra fine quality, really. It's cool in the summer. Wears well. And as for the price, why, it's a bargain. . . . Calico?—Surely!" He darts up the ladder again. "We have some very nice patterns.—Muslin . . . batiste; we have some very fine woollen batiste, Frun.—Anything Frun wants, *we* have it. The best qualities and the very lowest prices."

For that's how Kaufman had taught him to address the customers. Always to exalt the quality and speak depreciatively about the price. Kaufman was a tall, handsome man with dark crisp hair and beard, chiseled features and dreamy eyes.

Erland sighed. Ay, but he wished he himself could look like that! 'Twas a poet's head Kaufman had. But now, as for one with merely blond hair—and, too, he knew very well his eyes weren't anything as sad as Kaufman's.

But what was Kaufman doing in his private office on Saturdays? By the veriest accident Erland discovered something strange one day when, after a light knocking, he opened the door to say that an important customer was in the store and wanted to speak to Kaufman himself.

Erland's eyes popped at what he saw. For there was tall, dark Kaufman groaning loudly and pacing back and forth on the floor, covering his face with his hands and behaving as if he were in deepest agony. And around one hand he had wound some sort of a black ribbon with two small cubes on it. And now he gave another moan and beat his breast and didn't even notice the awe-struck Erland who slowly backed out of

* Madam.

the door, closing it softly, and then stood outside, holding his breath and listening to the sighs and groans of his employer.

First he thought maybe Kaufman was sick, but then he remembered the strange black ribbons and decided it was a mystery, an opinion which evidently was correct, for some ten minutes later Kaufman emerged from his office, looking just as if nothing at all had happened. And he went out into the store and met his customer. And he drove a very sharp bargain.

But as for Erland—he went around with a wise face. He knew what he knew. Only he kept wondering about the mystical meaning of the black ribbon with the cubes. If he but knew what they were for he would make some for himself and have mystical rites at the koloni or up in the attic.

Yah, and then there were the rabbinical killings of geese which also took place on Saturdays, in the mornings. But that spectacle made Erland just downright sick. He used to be sent with two or three live geese to an old white-bearded rabbi who wore a little round black cap on his head. The old man bent back tautly the necks of the poor geese, and with a sharp knife cut their throats, mumbling some prayers, so Erland thought, while the blood was gushing out of the cuts. Couldn't he at least have cracked the geese on the head first?

After the killing Erland carried the geese to Kaufman's elegant home. And on the way he was wishing fervently that he would catch a glimpse of Rachel. She was Kaufman's twelve-year-old daughter, a slender, quiet girl with a fine pale face, large eyes and black shining hair.

Erland adored Rachel, ay, even though he worshiped from a distance. And sometimes Rachel would come to the store and then Erland got all aflutter. On these occasions he was

especially grateful if some old lady came and required alpaca for a dress, or calico—or anything, so that he could step behind the counter. Ay, and he was polite and all service to the customer. He didn't mind at all running up that ladder ever so many times to bring down the stuff Frun wanted—or which he thought she might at least care to look at.

Oh, but Erland's stepping behind the counter on Rachel's visits to the store was dictated by weightier reasons than a mere desire to show off. For he felt vastly more sure of himself when Rachel couldn't see his legs and his short pants. Hadn't he asked mother a hundred times to get him a pair of long ones? But she always said no; he was not thirteen yet and short pants were good enough for him.

Oh, misery! He felt sick and weak after Rachel had left and he stood in the back room, looking at his legs in an old cracked mirror. The pants ended just above his knees and he thought his knee caps were entirely too big—bony-like. And his feet ought to have been much smaller. Much! They looked funny down there at the ends of his legs and with those clumsy boots on. And to think Rachel saw him like that!

Ay—but not always!

For, “Peter—look!” Hanna would whisper, nudging him to observe how Erland sat poring over the big family Bible in the yellowish light of the kerosene lamp.

“Hm—yah. . . .” Peter’s face took on an expression of certain respect as over the newspaper edge he secretly watched his young son so absorbed in the Sacred Book. “Hm—yah—” ’twas a comfort if his mind was thus inclined. Peter went back to his reading with a sigh. He remembered his own youth. Ay, and his thoughts had not often been holy!

Erland was reading. The story was about one Rachel,

youngest daughter of Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran . . . and came to the land of the children of the east. And he looked, and, behold, a well in the field, and lo, three flocks of sheep lying there by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and the stone upon the well's mouth was great. And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in its place. And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence are ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. . . .

While he was yet speaking with them Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.

Erland halted in his reading. He moved the kerosene lamp a little closer to the Bible, then sat looking absently into space, his finger marking where he had stopped.

He glanced down at the page, then sat again thinking.

And it came to pass, when Erland one day stood behind the desk in the store, that Kaufman came to him, where he stood behind the desk, and he lifted up his voice, and said, For many years thou hast served me well, tell me what shall thy wages be?

And Rachel was beautiful and well-favored, and she had a pale face and dark eyes, and black shining hair. And Erland loved Rachel; and he said, Give me for wife thy daughter Rachel. And Kaufman said, I will. For thou hast served me faithfully, and treated well my customers. And, lo, the maiden hast loved thee all these years. And Kaufman gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast.

36

ON COMING home from work one night Erland met Hjalmar Strömberg on the street. Hjalmar was a bright young mechanic, a boy of eighteen, a good-looking, broad-shouldered fellow with a winning smile. His great ambition was to become a bridge builder and to that end he attended evening school four times a week, in the meantime hoping to save up enough money to carry him through a few years at an engineering college.

"Hey, there!" said Hjalmar. "Want to come up with me and look at my new book? I've got another one about bridges."

"Sure," Erland replied. He liked to hear Hjalmar talk about his plans for the future—of the daring bridges he would span across turbulent rivers, bridges of masonry or steel, but, above all, of reinforced concrete. "For that's the building material of the future!" Hjalmar once exclaimed enthusiastically. And he went on explaining to Erland the marvelous properties of reinforced concrete. "You see, the concrete takes the stress and the iron the tension. And isn't it a wonderful stroke of good luck that iron and concrete have almost the same expansion

coefficient? You see, in heat and cold both the concrete and the iron expand and contract at the same rate exactly as if they were one homogeneous material. And once you've put the reinforcement into the concrete it lasts for ever because the concrete protects it so that it can't rust. And the concrete gets stronger and stronger till it's almost like natural stone—like some of those bridges the Romans built. Why, the cement they used in the joints between the stone blocks had gotten so hard that when the Italians wanted to pull down one of those bridges a few years ago they had to blast it to pieces, and even so the granite blocks split in the middle but the joints held. . . ."

Ay, when Hjalmar got started on bridges he could ramble on for hours without tiring. And he owned a whole little library of engineering books, most of which he had picked up in second-hand stores. He treasured these books above everything else and no one but himself was allowed to touch them.

As Hjalmar and Erland entered the yard they met the Krok-woman's husband, who came with his coat-collar turned up above his ears, for it was a cold night.

"Hello, Hjalmar. Hello, there, Erland. How's yer mother feeling?" Krok asked.

"She's getting better."

"That's good. I'm glad to hear that. Then she'll soon be home again, you'll see. It's pretty lonesome with mother away, ain't it?"

"Yah."

"Yah, of course.—Now, boys—don't get into deviltry. So long." With a laugh and a friendly nod Krok went on his way.

"I like him," said Erland as he and Hjalmar went upstairs.

"Yah, he's a nice fellow. If you want to make him feel good just say something nice about his Erik." Hjalmar laughed softly.

They halted in front of a door on the third landing. Hjalmar lightly pressed the bell, then opened the door and stepped in, followed by Erland.

"Good evening, mother," Hjalmar called into the kitchen. "Erland is here. I want to show him my new book."

"Good evening. Yah, the supper isn't quite ready yet. There's no hurry." Fru Strömberg was a corpulent woman with a kindly face, but it was shadowed by a constant expression of anxiety.

"Come," said Hjalmar and stepped into the living-room. He lit the lamp. The room was clean and neat. In one corner stood a small table, a chair and a crowded bookcase over which hung a framed picture of a soaring bridge.

Hjalmar picked a book from the shelves. He handled the volume lovingly in his large, capable hands. "Here it is," he said. "Look! What d'you say?" He turned the pages and flashed into view a number of beautifully colored illustrations. "Look at this: A Spanish War Bridge. The Bridge of St. Martin, Toledo. Built in 1212."

"Ah!" Erland caught his breath. He looked eagerly at the print which showed an old, rugged reddish-brown masonry bridge silhouetting its bold vaults and straight line of footway against a windy sky—an heroic central arch springing up to a dizzy height and spanning the blue river which lapped against the sturdy piers far below the arch's coping stone. Two smaller arches on either side of the great one, and on each river bank a massive gateway guarding the bridge.

"Isn't it grand?" said Hjalmar, bending over the book, his eyes gleaming in the lamplight.

"It's wonderful!" Erland murmured. "Wonderful!" He reverently turned the pages. Suddenly he cried out with delight. For over a deep chasm between two rocky promontories a graceful bridge hovered serenely at an awe-inspiring height, an immense semi-circular arch flying between the wild mountain banks, the long level-topped bridge with its pierced structure and many-vaulted approaches at the great height suggesting a string of jewelry held up against the cobalt sky, a necklace stretched across the ravine, with hanging pendants barely touching the wrinkled rocks. "Pont Sidi Rached at Constantinople, Algeria." The warm light from the kerosene lamp made richer and more glowing the colors of the print, the orange, the sky-blue and citron-yellow, the violet shadows, the sparing touches of glowing red. . . .

The boys are interrupted by a ring of the door bell. Voices are heard in the hall. The living-room door is opened and Fru Strömberg peeps in. "Elin," she says, looking worriedly at Hjalmar; then she pushes the door open wide and lets a girl of seventeen enter.

"Evening, Hjalmar," the girl coos. She walks toward him with a soft movement of her lissome body.

Hjalmar gets up from the chair. "Good evening," he says in a low guarded voice. His manner has suddenly changed; he seems to be on his defense now.

She puts one hand coaxingly on the lapel of his coat. "I feel so lonely tonight," she whispers, pursing her lips. She is pretty; she has an oval face framed by dark, smooth hair. "I almost never see you," she goes on, with mixed coquetry and

sadness, her hand stroking his coat lapel. She raises her eyes. "Want to take me out tonight . . . ?"

Hjalmar avoids looking at her. He glances at the book on the table in the lamplight. "I—I don't think I've time," he replies. "Elin, I've a whole lot to do. You know—homework and everything."

"What everything?" A rush of disappointment clouds her countenance.

"Oh—you know what I'm doing. You know—I'll have to stick to my books if I want to get anywhere. I've only the evenings. . . ."

"Yah—and you never have any time for me!" She withdraws a step from him and stands sulkily with her face averted.

Hjalmar nervously raps the table top with his fingers. He runs his hand through his loose hair. Absently he watches Erland who is turning the leaves of the book on bridges.

There is a long awkward silence.

At last Hjalmar appears to have made up his mind. "Elin—" he says in a conciliatory voice. "Elin. . . ."
He steps over to the girl and touches her arm lightly.

She turns to him with an expectant smile.

"Elin. Some other night. What do you say? When I've more time. . . ."

Her face again darkens. Her eyes flash with resentment. She pulls away from Hjalmar and steps to the door.

But she checks her anger. She bends her head and stands downcast with her hand on the door-knob. Neither she nor Hjalmar utters a word.

Slowly the girl pulls the door open. Hjalmar is standing in the middle of the floor, looking at her. Impulsively he lifts his

hand, with a movement as if he wanted to hold the girl back, but nothing comes of it, and he watches her leave the room. She lingers on the threshold for a brief moment and throws a furtive glance back at Hjalmar. But when he still does not speak she steps quickly out into the hall and leaves without another word.

Hjalmar stands looking absently at the closed door. Finally he pulls himself out of his thoughts and walks over to the table. "Yah, that's that," he says with a sigh.

"She's pretty," Erland says.

"Sure, she's pretty," Hjalmar replies. "I wish she weren't. She's lovely! Beautiful!" he bursts out passionately. "I could eat that girl alive! I could. . . ." He interrupts himself and bangs his fist on the table. "Oh, God!" he says between his teeth. "I've got to work hard if I'm going to make it. I've got to stick to my job. You know. Work first; and then women! It's not easy, though. But you've got to sacrifice a whole lot for your dreams—a whole lot, I tell you." He points to the picture on the wall, a print he once found in an old bookshop, an imaginative conception of a bridge flying triumphantly over a yawning void, its farther end losing itself in darkness and mist.

"Do you know the name of that picture?" Hjalmar asks. "It's the Bridge of Dreams, that's what it is."

Erland rises. He looks up at the picture with the bridge—a narrow pathway under the stars. He looks at it in silence, wondering what mystery might be hidden over there beyond the bridge's end where even the stars do not shine. . . .

How small is a boy on such a soaring bridge! How perilous the journey! Below him abysmal depth. On either side only

empty space. And such loneliness, such lonely wandering it seems. . . .

But suddenly within him there's a stab and a sickening tearing! The bridge collapses, and he is hurled into the bottomless chasm!

For there came to him this: Had he not promised God his poetry!

37

'T WAS no more than to be expected that while Hanna was in the hospital little Nils would get himself into mischief.

Peter had rashly given the boy two öre, and when Nils heard the frequent reports about his mother's steady improvement he felt that two Russian fire-crackers could do no harm—indeed, he craved something crackling to liven things up a bit, for his existence had been pretty monotonous of late.

And so he went to the cigar store and bought the explosives. He liked the feel of the two small compact cubes that weighed agreeably in his warm hand. And he liked the anarchical bi-colored paper enclosing the powder and sand of the filling—'twas a crude, deep blue and a bloody red.

Nils entered the snowy yard and stood pondering in what manner he would derive the greatest possible thrill from the two miniature bombs. To save them for a while and enjoy having them in his pocket was one thought suggesting itself, but after some deliberation Nils rejected the plan. 'Twas dangerous to keep them in one's pockets. Not that he feared an explosion. Far from that. 'Twas only that the fish hooks and

the pieces of colored glass he carried around with him had a tendency to eat away at things, and they might rip the fire-crackers open so that the powder would get out and the crackers wouldn't be any good.

No, indeed, had little Nils known a method whereby fire-crackers could be made to crack in one's pants-pockets then he would cheerfully have made the experiment. But that supreme enjoyment had so far been denied him in spite of his various and arduous efforts to produce the desired effect. He had, for example, pounded the outside of his pocket with a stick, but it seemed his leg was too soft, the flesh weakening the force of the blow needed to bring about an explosion.

He had also tried heat. He had hoped that by standing very close to the open fire door of the oven he might be able to effect an ignition, but even that failed, although he had endured the heat until he almost suffocated and his trousers were near catching fire.

No, so far little Nils knew of but two methods whereby a fire-cracker could be made to explode. One way was to throw the cracker into the fire, and this was unquestionably the best method, especially if a lot of pans and pots were standing on top of the oven when the explosion took place. But the chances for this enjoyment presented themselves only at rare intervals, for some one of the family was always around. Little Nils thought he had noticed them watching him of late—suspicious-like; but, of course, that might just be his imagination.

The other way of making a Russian fire-cracker go off was simply to throw it against some hard object. A stone would do, or a tree trunk, but on principle Nils never resorted to these measures. For explosions produced in this manner were flat. They had no volume to them and they left you com-

pletely unmoved; 'twas nothing more than a coachman's crack of his whip.

No, no! For real good fire-cracking one needed a stairway or something similar, a place where you could bring out the full echo of the shot. And so, to that end, Nils stepped from the yard into the hallway, and, having chosen a suitable corner, he expertly flung one of the crackers against the wall.

The explosion was very good. Little Nils stood drinking in the reverberations of the crack as they bounced from wall to wall up the stairs to the very top. He liked the way the sound diminished in intensity but somehow seemed to gain in richness and volume. And when the last eddying thud had died away the silence appeared much cleaner—purer—as if it had been refined by the sounding crack.

But 'twas soon again to be sullied, this time by the crabby voice of the landlord, the arch-enemy of little Nils. For suddenly the door of the ground-floor flat was violently pushed open and the landlord emerged, fearfully excited. Evidently Nils' fire-cracker had startled him out of a nap, for he was half-dazed with sleep and had no shoes on and was without his dungaree blouse.

"You! You! What's that? Whaddarye doin'? Ruining my house!" he cried. His small, sleep-heavy eyes peered anxiously round the walls, searching for a rent or a fissure that might have been caused by this shot that had awakened him.

The landlord was always a most unhappy man. And Fridman had spoken the truth that time of the fight between the Krok-woman and the landlord when he said that his former colleague was saving every penny he ever could get his hands on. The carpenter's whole life had narrowed down to this one point—of miserly saving. He had a horror of the slightest outlay of money, that's why he always went around in his

blue dungaree; he was afraid he would wear out his one good suit of clothes.

And one evening as he read his bank book, cold sweat began to trickle down his back at the sudden thought that the bank might fail and he would lose his money. Now followed many sleepless nights. After many soul-searchings and much vacillation and fretting, he at last decided to invest his savings in real estate, for then he felt he had something that couldn't vanish overnight. 'Twas true that a house might burn down, but he took out a big insurance policy—while he groaned loudly over this extra expense.

But peace was not to become a frequent guest in his heart. From having been beset by a lifelong obsession, he now became the victim of a haunting mania and felt compelled to be forever on guard lest any damage be inflicted on his property. The tenants hardly dared to stir. If they were cutting wood in the cellar he cried that they were ruining the floors; if a housewife swabbed the cement stairs he complained that she didn't mop them dry enough and that water was seeping into the walls and softening the plaster. He was indeed a trial to have around.

"You! You!" he bawled at little Nils. "Ye're ruining my house!" He jumped like a regular Jack-in-the-box. He yelled and he waved his arms.

Little Nils took the matter calmly. He had chosen a position by the open door leading out to the yard and knew from several past experiences that he was a much better runner than his enemy. And besides—the landlord had no shoes on.

Nor did Nils overlook the fact that he had still one firecracker in his pocket. After having first gauged the distance between himself and the landlord, he took the explosive out and weighed it meditatively in his hand.

The carpenter gave a maddened roar. "Give it t'me! You-u!" he shouted and sprang for the cracker.

But Nils stepped out into the yard and stood in the snow, looking at his opponent who was powerless in his stocking-feet. The carpenter shook his fist at little Nils. "You-u!" he threatened him, "When I get hold o' ye! You-u-u!"

"My mother's in the hospital," said Nils reproachfully.

But the carpenter was not moved by such sentiment. The sight of the second fire-cracker had turned his heart to flint. "Yeah!" he barked, "You-u-u! If I get hold o' ye ye'll land in th' hospital too."

Nils kept staring at the man's stocking-feet. For, somehow, they fascinated him. They were of the home-made sort with no shape to them, the kind that a man's wife is knitting on all year 'round and then gives him for a Christmas present as a surprise.

And suddenly, not knowing from what quarter the impulse came, little Nils flung his remaining fire-cracker at the landlord's stocking feet. The explosion was passably good, considering it took place in a door-opening and some of the nice sound was lost in the open air.

But the shouting carpenter made up for the loss.

And now there were two dashing through the gates; two were legging it up the slushy street.

But when little Nils reached the post-office corner and glanced back the carpenter had gotten no further than Ångström's Delicatessen.

Ay, what a scandal! And the next day the landlord's wife was crying because her husband was in bed with a terrible cold, and she said he had fever in his head and was raving and seeing things.

38

ON THE following Sunday Peter and the children were to go and see Hanna in the hospital. And now, what a confusion before they got under way! Of course they all had to put on their Sunday clothes and the very best of everything. Erland was down in the yard early in the morning, polishing six pairs of shoes.

And Peter had bought a whole bag full of fruit for mother. He had thoroughly rubbed both the apples and the pears with a woollen cloth so that they had a very nice sheen. And Fru Bergsson sent down a big piece of cake she herself had made. Peter said it was a good cake.

When they were almost ready to leave it struck Peter that they ought to bring some flowers also. He peered into his purse and rubbed his chin. "Yah, Erland," he said, "I think you had better run to the florist and get some flowers. Get fifty öre's worth. Tell them to give you some nice ones because they're for a sick person in a hospital."

Erland ran. The store was closed but he went the back way and the owner was home. The man said he couldn't give

Erland many flowers for fifty öre, especially now in the middle of the winter, but he put a lot of greenery around them and that made the bouquet look nice and big. And when it was all wrapped in white tissue paper, why, it was surely something worth bringing mother in the hospital.

When Erland got back home a quarrel started between the girls as to who should carry the flowers. Peter decided that Marta should, because she was the oldest next to Erland. The fruit was divided in three bags, one each for Vanda and Britta and Little Nils. Erland carried the cake.

They arrived at the hospital somewhat early and had to wait outside the gates which were not opened until two o'clock. A big crowd of people was waiting to get in. Some of them looked very sad. They were all poor people, because this was the Municipal Hospital, but somehow each and everyone of them had managed to bring along something for the sick relative or friend they had come to visit. But only God knows what stuff they had in those crumpled grocery bags they were hugging in their gnarled working hands!

There was a great deal of hustling and elbowing when the guard opened the gates, for everyone tried to get in first. And the guard examined their bags and bundles to make sure they were not bringing into the hospital any liquor or other stuff that was forbidden.

Having squeezed through the crush at the gates and crossed a big lawn, Peter and the children entered the building that housed the maternity ward. They mounted a stairway and then walked through a long corridor which had a depressing hospital smell. Through open doors they glanced into small rooms where pale and yellow-faced patients lay in their beds, some with their backs propped up with pillows.

They halted at the end of the corridor and stood in the doorway of a large room, looking about them at the many rows of identical beds.

"There she is!" Britta cried, her arm jerking out. And yah, yah, who was that but Hanna waving a white hand at them, her face wreathed in smiles, although it was pale and there were dark shadows circling her eyes?

"That's mother," said Nils gravely, and his eyes grew big. "I wanna go to her," he added, tugging at Peter's hand, and now there was a sob back of his voice.

"Sh-h-h! Not so loud!" Peter warned. A glow had come to his face. "Hm-m-m!" He pulled in his chin and assumed a bearing very straight and erect. And gathering the children about him he advanced solemnly toward the bed.

Hanna eagerly rose on her elbow. She beamed on Peter, and her eyes were flooded with light. And then she got into a flurry trying to look at all the children simultaneously.

"Good day, Hanna. Lie down," Peter begged her. "Be careful! Lie down! How are you?" He coughed and he cleared his throat. "Hm-m-m—You're looking fine," he lied manfully.

"Dear, dear. . . ." Hanna sank back on the pillows and reached for her handkerchief. She dabbed at her eyes and had a good little cry all by herself, then she was ready to greet them and hear how they were making out.

"Nils—come here," she murmured. She brushed his blond shock of hair away from his forehead. "Have you felt lonesome with me away?"

Little Nils gave a heart-breaking sob. If only the others wouldn't tell mother what he had done to the landlord. . . .

But now Britta pushed herself to the front. "Here's some apples, mother," she said, handing over her bag. She giggled

nervously but seemed greatly pleased with herself. She shifted her weight from the right foot to the left and then back to the right again.—Now, this was something, having a mother in a hospital and to come visiting, all dressed up and bringing fruit. But—a shadow of envy darkened her countenance—for there was Marta putting the bouquet of flowers on mother's bed.

"Dear, dear . . . flowers!" Hanna hardly gave herself time to remove the tissue paper in her hurry to press the flowers to her face and smell them. "Thanks, Marta dear!—Thanks, all of you!" She secretly snuggled her hand into Peter's as he stood there fully occupied with his throat which needed to be cleared every other second today, it seemed.

Yah, Erland thought as he stood behind his flurried sisters who were spreading themselves all over the place. Yah.— He fidgeted with the parcel containing Fru Bergsson's cake. Here he was, entirely neglected. Now, if his mother had only known about what had happened in the back room the other day and what a sacrifice he had made for her! Why, 'twas really he who had saved her! And yet, here he was crowded aside by his sisters all swelled up with themselves as if they amounted to anything worth mention! But who paid any attention to him? No one! He could just as well have stayed home! Darn it! He felt like taking Britta by the throat and choking the life out of her the way she stood there with that silly giggle on her conceited face. She always did manage to get herself to the front, anyway!

And now here was Vanda advancing timidly with her bag of pears. "Little Vanda, thank you!" Hanna's eyes grew moist again; she patted the girl's hand.—"And what's this, Erland? A cake!—From Fru Bergsson! Thanks, thanks." Oh, but

now Hanna had to get out her handkerchief and wipe her eyes. Peter and the children shifted on their feet and glanced at each other. Ay, 'twas a very sad and satisfactory visit!

But soon Hanna was herself again. "Now," she said, and something solemn entered her face. "I suppose you all want to have a look at your little brother." She turned to the small bundle beside her in the bed and with infinite care undid some of the wrappings. Ay, and now they were all craning their necks forward. What's that! A baby? That red little wrinkled and puckered face!—Yah, hm, so that's it. . . .

So that's what it looks like, Britta reflected. Yah, now she truly believed the amazing stories she had heard—from whispering housewives and all. And as for the stork—she was through with that bird.

Little Nils reservedly held himself at some distance from the baby, but he closely watched its face. And as he did so he noticed a sudden wrinkling and creasing, and out of that funny thing came a yell, surprising in its fierceness and loudness. Glancing quickly at his mother Nils noted that she approved of the baby yelling like that.—He wondered.

"Yah, Erland," said Hanna. "How do you like your brother?"

Erland dutifully bent forward and peered at the thing that was making all this noise. "It's nice," he mumbled, but deep within his heart he was puzzled at all the fuss. Indeed, he thought the baby was downright ugly, with its puckered little old-man face and the button of a nose that stuck unexpectedly out of the red flesh but just the same managed to wrinkle dreadfully at every yell. And then that bald head, and worst of all—those closed slits of eyes! Confound it, thought Er-

land, if the thing would only open its eyes once and look at me straight I might be able to get some liking for it!

But the baby showed no desire to look upon the world into which it had been so precipitately ushered. Ay, judging from its behavior, it counted it an irreparable calamity to have been thrown among these strangers. The small red fists were clenched as if in impotent rage and struck out right and left, jerkily and blindly, making one feel that the baby was engaged in a desperate struggle with an invisible foe. But all the time it doggedly kept its eyes tightly closed. It just didn't care to look at those babbling folk. And they were taking liberties too—poking at it and touching it and laying on hands in the most vulgar fashion! The baby shrieked. Pitch-black Eternities from which it had wearisomely emerged! Had those stupid giants no manners!

But Peter coaxed his face into the folds that spoke very well of fatherly and husbandly pride.—And now wasn't that baby big and fat? "It takes after you, I think," he said, turning to Hanna. But she said it had his nose and forehead.

"Yah—I see," said Peter, thoughtfully. "Yah—hm!"

The baby now seemed to realize the utter hopelessness of its single-handed rebellion. It was here in this crude world, for good or for evil. The tiny arms became still and the fists relaxed; the puckered brow grew less puckered, and after a final emphatic high-keyed protesting yell the baby composed its face into an expression of apathetic indifference and sank into repose, but still contemptuously with its eye-slits shut.—Rather choke than look at those chatter-boxes standing around the bed! And when Hanna tenderly folded the wrappings about the child she only seemed to satisfy its most passionate wish.

"Yah, and how are you managing things home?" said Hanna, turning to Peter, and now her face became anxious. "And the post-office?" She plucked at the blanket and gave an embarrassed laugh. "Here I am having it easy in bed while you poor folks are doing all the work!"

"No. Hanna, hm. Don't say that. We are getting along well enough. The children have been good. All of them."—Little Nils lowered his eyes to the floor.—"And Erland and Marta have been helping me with the cleaning every night."

"Come here, children. . . ." Hanna's voice sounded strangely tremulous. "Come." She got hold of their hands and pressed them hard. "I'll soon be back home again . . . tell me—have you missed me any . . . ?"

As Erland glanced up he met his mother's eyes, glittering with treacherous tears. And once more he felt a pressure of her hand. But now she had to take the other children by the hand again, too, so they wouldn't get jealous. "Ack, yah!" Hanna sighed. "And you, Peter, aren't you all tired out—what with the shop and the post-office and everything?"

"No. Oh, no!" Peter thrust out his chest. "Oh, no, Hanna—I—we are doing well . . . of course—naturally—we'll be glad when you get back home again. Hm! But now, you just take it easy. And don't worry. . . ."

"There's Uncle Hasse!" little Nils gave a sudden shout, forgetting he was in a hospital and ought to show his very best manners.

And when they all turned round and looked toward the door, ay, who was that standing over there in a navy-blue double-breasted serge if not the bold sailor himself, his arms loaded with bags and parcels and something the size of a flower garden stuck under his arm.

And who was the man he had brought with him? Who was that big bulky fellow who stood twirling the ends of an enormous moustache? Why, Volmer, of course! Volmer! Who else could boast of such a well-moulded adornment below his nose? And today he had waxed the moustache-ends and twirled them into the shape of long thin strings. Ay, 'twas Volmer, no mistake, and what he wasn't carrying in his hands he had stuffed into his roomy pockets. And now he caught sight of Hanna and gave a grin and poked Uncle Hasse in the ribs.

"Keep still, Nils! Keep still!" said Hanna. "Peter, you take his hand!" And oh, she was up on her elbow and her eyes were bright!

For here they come, crossing the shining hospital floor, those two good friends and true! Uncle Hasse's creaking shoes are holding their own even amidst all this noise of chattering visitors. And ay, for those swaying shoulders! And oh, for those salt-water strides of his! One can easily see he's been far and wide and braved many a rough storm in the North Sea.

"Good day, Hanna. Good day. You're looking fine." Uncle Hasse dumps his load of parcels and bags on the bed; nearly burying Hanna. But little Nils edges away from Peter and tries to get closer to the seafaring man.

"Yah—an' here's a flower to smell," Uncle Hasse casually remarks, dropping the garden on Hanna's face.

"And Volmer, how are you? And what's that you bring? Candy de-luxe! Ack, yah! Can a person be blamed for crawling to bed! Why, it's heaven, this!"

"Yah," said Volmer and twirled his moustache. "I came to the house just after you and the children had left, Peter. Fru Bergsson told me. And while I stood wondering what I had

better do along came Hansson and so we both trotted over here, but we got lost in the corridors, that's why we're late!"

"Oh, you men!" said Hanna. "You men! One would think that blindfolded you'd find the Maternity Ward!"

"Smells just like on a ship here," Uncle Hasse remarked, sniffing the air. "When I was at sea we had a cook once who . . ."

"We'll have to leave at four, isn't that so, Hanna?" Peter broke in.

"Yah, yah. The time is flying."

"You had better buck up and get well in a hurry," Volmer said. "Because this won't do. Why, it's the third Sunday I'm without my pickled herring."

Hanna gave a merry laugh. "I'll pickle your moustache some day," she retorted. Ay, she was getting into her own, even if she was rather pale and thin and her eyes had dark, deep shadows.

" . . . and we couldn't cook a thing while the hurricane lasted," Uncle Hasse was telling little Nils, since no one else would listen to him. "Why, the first big sea that came crashing over the ship went through the galley and cleared it of every pot an' pan we had. . . ."

"Say, you," Hanna caught his attention. She had again uncovered the baby's face. "Look here, you. Here's another one for you to start in with—now that you've completely ruined Nils!"

Ay, and 'twas never to leave Hanna's memory what a change came to Uncle Hasse's weatherbeaten face as he bent over the baby. He just didn't say a thing, only looked and looked. Maybe he remembered how not so many years ago he had been standing like this, looking at little Nils. Or he

might even think himself further back if he cared. For Erland was well over thirteen now and there were Marta and Vanda and Britta that had come since Erland was born.

Uncle Hasse looked and looked, and as he bent over the bed his face seemed very red and flushed. And now he carefully touched the baby's cheek with a forefinger that seemed like the gnarled branch of a tree, hovering above the small baby face. But the baby slept on in blissful ignorance of the seaman's presence, not knowing the part the latter was destined to play in its tender life—what with cracked biscuits and pennies and hold-ups and all.

And so, when Volmer had made a close scrutiny also and said that the baby looked fine, then Hanna again tucked it into its snuggling warmth. "Peter," she whispered. "Tell me—how do you feel? Are you terribly tired at nights? And how are your sweatings? Are they still very bad?"

"Oh, no, not so bad.—Hm.—Don't worry, Hanna. Everything is going well."

"No, I won't worry. But just tell me this—I've been wondering—you're sure you're putting out all the lights in the post-office before you leave after the cleanings? You remember how the postmaster got angry that time we had forgotten to switch off the light in the wash room?—Yah. And there's plenty of clean shirts and things for the children in the upper drawer in the bureau. And now—what more did I want to say . . . ? They'll be chasing you out of here in a minute. . . . Oh, yah, I was thinking of you, Erland. You're starting at that factory tomorrow, aren't you? Yah—it may not be exactly what you'd like but just do your best and brighter days might come.—Yah, yah! Oh, there's the bell! Dear ones! Dear ones! The hour is over! How time flies! Don't cry, Vanda—and you, Marta.

Here's an apple for each of you. And here's one for Nils. I'll soon be home again. Yah, Peter, good-bye. You'll all come and see me next Sunday, won't you? So long, Hansson, and a thousand thanks for all that you brought me. You wait till I get out of bed and I'll teach you how to be extravagant! And you, Volmer—thanks, thanks! When I get home we'll have a party with nothing but pickled herring and schnaps! How would that suit you, you big vain thing? Why, you ought to cut off that moustache!—Bye, bye—all of you!—Bye, Peter! Oh, the nurse is glaring at us. You'll have to go. Give my regards to Fru Bergsson and thank her for that cake. . . . Good-bye, Erland. . . . Bye, bye. . . .”

They troop toward the door. And Peter is looking very grave, a little thin, a little tired, and frail as he always does, and particularly when he is sad. Nils has slipped his hand into Uncle Hasse's big paw. But the seaman isn't saying a word as he steers across the floor in the wake of the equally silent Volmer.

At the door they all turn around and wave a final farewell to Hanna. She is up on her elbow and waving her free hand at them. Oh, but her face is pale! And presently she lies back and crushes the handkerchief to her eyes.

39

A Y, WHAT is Man but a straw in the wind, carried whither he knows not! Take Erland, for example. Here he was again, drifting into another job.

For he had quit Kaufman's drapery store. Ay, Rachel had not been herself at all lately. She had come to the store often enough but never a glance had she bestowed upon him who wore himself thin in her father's service.—Calico, mohair and silken batiste!—he had been doing his uttermost. But not a look from those dark dreaming eyes! Not once did her delicately shaped lips form a friendly greeting to him. Oh, no! As far as she was concerned, Erland could have been working in a back street shop, selling burlap!

Ha!—Oh, yah, but he was not blind to the reasons for Rachel's behavior. He bitterly realized the naked facts—for one thing 'twas those knee caps of his. They seemed to grow bigger with every day. And as for his feet, a new pair of shoes would have helped him greatly, but where would he get the money . . . ?

And so he did the only thing left for him to do—he re-

moved his offensive appearance from Rachel's presence. Ay, and now she could come to the store and wouldn't have to stare at the wall as she used to when he was selling alpaca behind the counter. Now she could trip lightly across the floor with that wonderful movement of her hips—and Erland wouldn't be there to disturb her. He had not known she resented his looking at her. She could go on living her life, dark-eyed and pale-faced—he would be living his. He had ruthlessly cut the ties that bound them! He was out of that store. It might be she would at least notice his absence, even if she had never cared to look at him. For that's the way it often happens in this life. You don't appreciate a person while he is with you, but when he is gone—forever—then you reach out your hand, and, lo—where is he?

40

AND now Erland was in the moulding business. Hanna had called the place a factory but it was really nothing but a very small shop, only three men working there, Mattsson who owned the place, one journeyman, and Erland.

To tell the truth, 'twas Hanna's doing, for she had got Erland the job before she went to the hospital. "You'll earn one krona more in that place," she had said. "One krona here and another there; the times are hard and we need the money."

Oh, but it was a dark smoky place! Once in there you couldn't tell whether it was summer or winter outside. 'Twas mouldings for picture frames they made; a lumber yard supplied the wooden raw material in lengths of about eight feet. And now the plain wood was to be transformed into beautifully polished mouldings, imitations of walnut, mahogany, oak and every imaginable kind of wood with gilt edges and all.

Erland's chief task was to help Mattsson "ground" the mouldings. For after the wood had been washed with a hot glue solution it was given three successive coats of a gypsum-

like substance which hardened quickly and then was sandpapered and after that submitted to the journeyman's expert treatment and covered with several coats of shellac and so polished.

Mattsson was a man of fifty whom Fate had marked for tragedy. In his youth he must have been a handsome fellow, judging from his broad shoulders, his soft curly blond hair and regular features. But too heavy burdens had bent him and stooped him. His inward-looking eyes were always fixed on the ground as he walked. And his face was pallid and lined.

When Mattsson was out the journeyman told Erland about their employer's trials. "One of his girls is in the hospital," he said. "She has consumption. And he knows she won't get well. He's had three children dying from it already, two boys and a girl. The girl was named Blenda. I saw her often before she got sick. She was beautiful. You have no idea! Blond hair and blue eyes, and you never saw such skin—so clear and white it's unbelievable, and her cheeks red. God, she was pretty! And he spent lots of money on her, keeping her in business school and everything. And then she took sick all of a sudden. She was sixteen then. All his children looked fine until they were about that age, then they got sick and in a few months it was all over. Now it's Dagmar. She was taken to the hospital last month."

And in addition Mattsson was always harassed because of lack of money. In order to keep his business going at all he had no choice but to sell his mouldings on credit to the various small shop owners and picture framers with whom he dealt. And he was forced to haggle and argue and practically wrest from them every penny they owed him. Regularly every Saturday morning he put on his good suit of clothes and spent

the entire day trudging around the city to his many debtors, entreating them to pay him a little of what was due. On coming back to the shop late in the afternoon he was always weary and miserable-tempered and almost never had enough money even for the weekly wages of his journeyman, the quiet patient Frans, a young fellow of twenty-one.

In a small dusty attic of the tenement house where he lived Mattsson had fixed up a work shop where he could be heard far into the nights framing pictures for people, in this way trying to add a few kronor to his income. And all through the day he was slaving away at the grounding machine, a rough-timbered wooden structure of about the height of a man. In the center was a removable steel plate the size of a man's hand; the plate was called a steel profile because in its middle was cut an opening shaped like the profile of the moulding which Mattsson pushed through the machine from end to end. From a bucket with a tap the hot grounding poured down on the moulding and spread out evenly in a thin layer as the wood passed through the profile.

On the other side of the machine Erland received the mouldings as they came out of the profile. He picked the wooden lengths lightly with his finger-tips so as not to leave any marks in the soft grounding. Then he put the mouldings upright against a set of racks where they remained until dry when they were pushed through the machine once more. After three groundings they were sandpapered and ready for Frans at his polishing bench.

While Mattsson was engaged with the monotonous task of pushing innumerable mouldings through the machine he repeated over and over, in a tired, melancholy, sing-song voice, the lines of an old ditty:

“Is this the soldier’s way?
Is this the soldier’s manner?
Treating us like slaves,
To serve his hated banner.
Our Swedish land is still
In darkness plunged.—And when
Shall light be given us
By our learned men?”

He sighed and pushed another moulding through the profile, adjusted the leather pad protecting the palm of his right hand and, with his peculiar heavy gait, went to pick up one more moulding which he shoved into the machine.

“Is this the soldier’s way?
Is this the soldier’s manner?
Treating us like slaves,
To serve his hated banner.
. . . ”

And in the meantime Frans hurried ceaselessly back and forth in the narrow space between the wall and the polishing bench, holding in his right hand a piece of linen stuffed with cotton and shaped into a small compact ball, soaked with shellac, which he pressed well down over the upper surface of the moulding. And so he kept on all through the day, polishing set after set of mouldings tacked on to the frame. He was surrounded by a veritable forest of variously profiled mouldings leaning against the wall and straggling between the racks. The floor planks in front of the bench were worn to a deep channel by the constant shuffling of feet during many long years as journeymen had come and worked for a

time and then left again, making room for others who had taken their place at the bench, polishing, polishing in that dark hole of a shop where, during the winter months, the kerosene lamps suspended from the ceiling had sometimes to be lit at three in the afternoon.

“Is this the soldier’s way?
Is this the soldier’s manner?
Treating us like slaves,
To serve his hated banner.
. . . ”

Frans was a tall but extremely frail-looking youth, gentle and quiet and soft-spoken, with a pale, sallow face which seemed never to have been touched by sunlight. He had a finely shaped aquiline nose, thin sensitive lips and mild eyes —a personality almost feminine. Erland found a friend in him from the very beginning and even went so far as to show Frans his copy book of poems with the pictures he had drawn. And when Frans said he liked the poems, and even read one or two over a second time, then Erland nearly went into an ecstasy of happiness.

41

WHEN Erland rose in the early mornings he was always intensely aware of a strange unearthly atmosphere hovering outside the windows. Now in the winter a film of frost covered all objects—a white immaculate veil not touched by any human hand, and every twig of the great old tree looked as if sprinkled with silver dust.

Erland stepped to the window, bent forward and looked down upon the frost-tipped picket fence in the yard.—It was still—motionless, still. The cluster of outhouses with frost on their roofs—they were still. Stretched across the yard a thin clothes line hung like a silver thread, and it, too, was still—the cobblestones, the pump, the steps leading down to the wash-house—a virgin stillness like the invisible waters of a mighty sea bathed everything. And then the first pale dawn crept stealthily upon the cold sky, coming like a Spirit to again inhabit the sleeping Earth.

Life awakened to the new working day. First the trees became articulate with frail twitters of rugged sparrows, and

the gradually increasing light wound itself softly round the frozen twigs.

And now also the dark tenement houses began to show signs of life as the Spirit of Day flowed into them. Windows were brightened by flickering lights, voices heard, doors opened and closed, footsteps pattering on the stairs. And along the street an occasional cart or wagon came with a heavy rumble.

About an hour later Erland started his work at the ground-ing machine in the dimly lighted shop. The place was a haunt for many odd characters more or less loosely connected with the moulding business—salesmen, and fellows painting on glass or canvas crude pictures which they framed with elaborate and heavily gilt mouldings and then peddled to poor unsophisticated souls easily taken in by their salesman's talk, hungering as they were for something gilt and glittering to brighten up their cheerless homes.

One of the men who often came to the shop was the red-headed Jönsson who owned a small farm but dabbled in the moulding business on the side. A duller and more dull-looking fellow could not be imagined, slovenly and coarse, and with popping, expressionless eyes. His unkempt, straggly red hair and scrubbing-brush moustache and stubble of brick-colored beard provoked comment even from those who ordinarily gave but scant thought to appearance.

For hours at a time he would be pacing the floor in Matts-son's shop, measuring his steps as if their equal length were a matter of utmost importance, chattering meanwhile about some potatoes he wanted to sell if he could get his price. And as he was thus stumping up and down the floor, his head bobbing at each step as if on a wound-up mechanical dummy, he held his gaze glued to the floor planks, his eyes bleary with

worry—the one single expression of which they seemed capable.

Back and forth he paced on that floor, fretting about a sack of potatoes, a basket of beets or turnips or a bushel of apples, and always his grubby hands were pawing with an enormous red tobacco-stained handkerchief which he sullenly pulled and twisted into a small compact ball and then undid again, only once more to begin pressing it into the same shape as before.

Yet, according to his own words, he was always doing business. A day given to fretting in Mattsson's shop was time he had spent in business, and likewise hours in some saloon when the other fellow would surely be paying for the drinks. For Jönsson held on to his pennies. As was the case with the landlord in Flint Street, money was uppermost in his constricted mind, only he didn't have enough brains to make any. And so he rambled about, dull and depressed and pop-eyed. And worry gnawed at his vitals.

And Mattsson, with his beautiful daughter Dagmar wasting away in the hospital—Mattsson kept on working like an automaton at the grounding machine, toiling all through the day, working away in his attic long after the midnight hour, and still never making a living, his face growing more and more grey and bitter, his once powerful shoulders stooped and bent. . . .

And as if trying to chase away harassing thoughts from his mind he kept on repeating, over and over again, eternally:

"Is this the soldier's way?
Is this the soldier's manner?
Treating us like slaves,

Our Daily Bread

To serve his hated banner.
Our Swedish land is still
In darkness plunged.—And when
Shall light be given us
By our learned men?"

42

ANOTHER one of the hangers-about in the shop was salesman Lund, a strapping young fellow and brisk enough, but Erland hated him for his filthy language and bragging accounts of what he did to women. The obscenity sickened the boy and awoke in him a strange, haunting fear. The atmosphere in the shop seemed to him thick and foul. Lund's raw stories took his breath away. His face was scarlet. He did not know where to look. And seldom could he escape the smut for he had to keep going at the machine where Mattsson and he were grounding the mouldings.

But dull-faced and pop-eyed Jönsson enjoyed this sort of thing immensely and even appeared momentarily to forget about his potatoes.—Ay, here was something well within the limits of his understanding! And when Lund went into particularly foul-mouthed descriptions of his amorous exploits, then Jönsson chuckled deep down in his throat, one gurgle for each jerk of his head as he tramped the floor and twisted his soiled red handkerchief.

But if Erland on these occasions was not working at the

grounding machine but occupied with something else—sandpapering, or wrapping finished mouldings into protective long reams of paper—then he would go and stand behind the big stacks of mouldings at the back of the room where he could not hear what was said; or sometimes he walked out of the shop, pretending to be going downstairs, flushed and frantic with rage and shame and a choking fear that became worse every day. And in his exasperation he would mutter violent threats and clench his fists and shake them up toward the door of the shop, feeling a wild desire to run up and kill those filthy-mouthed tormentors of his.

But the mild-mannered Frans made the place bearable for Erland, and when they were alone in the shop they had much to talk about. Like his employer, Frans, too, was always harassed by lack of money. Mattsson owed him large sums, a debt which had gradually accumulated because of Mattsson's inability to make his own debtors pay him. And so it was but ordinary routine that late on Saturday afternoons Mattsson, weary and discouraged, returned to the shop and spread out on the work bench a handful of bills which he and Frans in the best possible manner divided between them. But there was never enough to still even temporarily their anxieties.

Especially was his tailor a continuous worry to Frans, who never owned more than one passable suit of clothes and that one always bought on the instalment plan. As a rule, the last payments on a suit lagged behind until the clothes were worn out and Frans was in urgent need of new ones. And then the same haggling and bargaining with the tailor had to start all over again.

Now and then Frans' father would climb the dusty stairs to

the shop and spend an hour or so watching the work and having a chat with Mattsson.

Pålsson was a man of fifty, broken in health and hobbling about with a cane. Some years back he had owned a big farm, but one thunderstorm-night lightning had struck the main building which had caught fire and burned to the ground with barns and stables, most of the live stock succumbing in the flames. Pålsson had acquired the farm only a short while previously and had not yet taken out one öre's worth of insurance, so the unfortunate accident ruined him completely. He never recovered from the shock but went about eating out his heart, brooding over his misfortune. Soon his health began to fail, and after he had moved with his family to the city and taken a small flat in a tenement house, he became dependent on his three sons for support, and of these Frans was the eldest.

One day while Dagmar was in the hospital Pålsson as usual came to the shop. He had taken a few drinks and was in a quarrelsome mood. Mattsson was shoving mouldings into the grounding machine.

Pålsson hung around for some time, and one could tell from his despondent expression that something was chafing his mind.

Presently he said to Mattsson: "Aren't ye goin' to pay Frans something of what ye owe him?"

Mattsson gave him a quick glance. The two of them had always been friendly enough and so Pålsson's question was unexpected.

Mattsson put another moulding through the machine before he answered. He had many heavy concerns on his mind these

days and his face showed it. Then he said. "I'm sorry, Pålsson.—But you know how things are."

"Ach!" Pålsson took a few stumbling steps across the floor, his cane thudding the planks. "Things! Things!" he retorted, his haggard face flushing with anger. "Things!" he repeated. "When will he get th' money?"

"As soon as I can lay my hands on some," said Mattsson quietly, stopping his work and turning to Pålsson who was trembling with rising excitement.

"Father! Father!" Frans came and took the old man by the arm, but Pålsson angrily brushed him away. Misfortune, illness, poverty and anxiety had gradually carried on its destructive work and poisoned his mind. Now, with the few drinks loosening his self-control, his pent-up despair and bitterness sought for an outlet.

"Father! What's the matter? Be quiet!" Frans tried to soothe him.

But again he cried out to Mattson: "Aren't ye never goin' to pay him?"

"No!" Mattson snapped back. "He won't have a damn öre!"

For now, Mattson, too, felt his soul's misery breaking through the thin surface calm with which he ordinarily surrounded himself. His face was pale.

Pålsson advanced a step, his knuckles whitening around the handle of his heavy cane. His head shook as in palsy. "Are we goin' to starve!" he screamed.

Mattsson moistened his lips. "Yah." He retorted in a taut voice. "You are!—I am!—Body and soul. . . ."

Thus they stood for a few moments, glaring at each other, trembling and pale and threatening as though they were

enemies, both of them goaded beyond reason by their common enemy, Man's great enemy—Want.

Frans, also, was pale and upset. Pushing and dragging, he finally got his father to the door. There the old man halted for a brief second and looked back at Mattsson, who remained motionless by the grounding machine, gazing after his former friend. Pålsson had calmed down somewhat and it looked as if he were groping for a conciliatory word. But he could not find it in his befuddled mind and so allowed Frans to shove him out on the stairs.

And the word was never said, for a few weeks later he was taken ill and died shortly after.

43

NOW as Hanna was expected home from the hospital any day, grandma sent word to Peter that she had knitted a woollen jacket which Hanna ought to wear these cold winter days after her illness.

And so on a Saturday afternoon when Erland got home from work Peter sent him out to the Kirseberg Hills to fetch the jacket. Erland took his green sled along with him because pulling the sled made the long walk less monotonous.

When he came to grandma's house Little Aunt was getting dressed to go to the weekly meeting of the Girls' Christian Club of which she had been a member for years. Three girls, her friends, were sitting around waiting for her. They looked very demure and correct, with no frills or ornaments to attract attention, only a silver cross suspended from a thin chain around the neck.

"Take off yer mittens, boy," said grandma as she came waddling up to him and helped pull off his overcoat. She took his cold hands between her own warm ones and rubbed them vigorously. "Ye aren't cold, are ye? Now just wait a

minute till I get Ida off an' I'll make ye a big cup o' chocolate with whipped cream. How would ye like that?"

"I'd like it," said Erland, and pictured to himself the big old cup in which grandma would bring the chocolate. The cup was brown with age and all covered with a network of fine dark cracks.

Erland sat on a chair and twiddled his thumbs, feeling ill at ease in the presence of Ida's friends. There was something very depressing about them, he thought. Why didn't they smile at least once or say something cheerful? One of them was telling how her mother had rheumatism and couldn't sleep nights. The girl spoke in a sickly sort of wailing tone that made one wish she would get rheumatism, too, or sprain her ankle or something. She had lots of pimples on her face and was always putting her head to one side as she spoke. But Erland thought perhaps that was the Christian way in clubs of that kind.

"Hurry up now, Ida!" grandma prompted Little Aunt who came limping out from her room in felt slippers to get something from a bureau drawer.

Little Aunt pouted her red lips as she poked about impatiently in the drawer. She tossed her blond curly hair.

"Dear child, what are ye looking for?" grandma asked and came to help her. "My, the way ye're upsetting everything!"

Without answering, Little Aunt kept on tearing among the white neatly-folded linen in the drawer. Erland felt a whiff of lavender coming toward him.

"What is it ye want?" grandma asked again, surely for the fourth time. The three friends inclined their heads and regarded Little Aunt with sweet indulgence and great sisterly love.

"My drawers!" Little Aunt cried, exasperated. "Where are they?" She sounded as mad as anything.

The girls caught their breath and threw furtive glances at Erland who sat and squirmed on his chair. The pimply-faced girl with the rheumatic mother blushed to the roots of her snuff-colored hair.

"Ida!" said grandma sternly and took a quick hard grip on her arm. "Aren't ye ashamed o' yerself? Go into yer room an' let me find yer things!" She looked indignantly after her daughter who sullenly limped back into her cozy little room.

Grandma soon found what she wanted and, hiding the garment discreetly under her arm, she carried it in to Ida.

"I don't want that!" Little Aunt was heard protesting. "I want the good pair with the lace."

"Lace! For a week day?" Grandma objected in hushed tones.

"I don't care. I don't want to go to the meeting with those old . . ."

"Sh-h-h-!" Grandma looked very distressed as she came waddling out of the room and went again to the bureau. Another whiff of lavender filled the room. She took something out of the drawer and returned to Ida. Then she came back and stepped to the oven and put on a pan of milk for Erland's chocolate. She seemed worried. "Don't know what's the matter with that child," she sighed, turning to Ida's friends. "She's been behaving so strangely of late. One day she sings an' is as happy as she can be, an' the next she's so cranky it's more'n I can stand."

"Maybe she isn't feeling well," one of the girls suggested. Her expression seemed to indicate she wasn't feeling very

well herself, although it would have been difficult to say just where the trouble lay.

Grandma sighed and shook her head. But now Little Aunt was dressed and came into the room with her low-heeled shoes well polished, the silver cross round her neck, and her hair covered with a black woollen cap which grandma had knitted for her.

The friends rose. Grandma followed them out on the stoop. "Take care o' yerself now," she said. "An' be sure t'come right back home from the meeting."

"Ya-ah, ya-ah," the girls replied in their sing-song voices, putting their heads to one side, their faces shining with smiles.

"They're nice girls, aren't they?" said grandma as she came back into the room. She patted Erland's head.

The boy didn't doubt grandma's word, but every time he thought of Ida's friends he hoped they would slip on the snow and go down plop and hurt their behinds.

But now here came grandma with the big age-browned cup full of steaming chocolate and whipped cream floating like snow on the top. And as Erland had come all the long way from Flint Street, he would stay a couple of hours, maybe until Little Aunt came back from the meeting.

"You go into Ida's room an' look at her books," said grandma when he had finished his chocolate. "Because I'm going to clean up a bit here."

A very holy atmosphere pervaded Little Aunt's room. On the wall facing her bed hung a large framed picture of Our Savior crowned with thorns and carrying his heavy cross. On a side table stood an enlarged photograph showing the members of the Girls' Christian Club. Their leader was there, too,

Pastor Florell, their idol and adored hero, a portly man well past middle age, with a full face that radiated good-will and love.

Little Aunt had a number of books, but they were all religious. Erland tried one after the other—*Tunes of Zion*, *Pilgrims' Songs*, *Faithful Bible Friends* and many others, but he thought they made rather dull reading. Then he tried one named *Daily Meditations*. As he opened the book his eyes lighted on the following lines:

“Be humble when life’s gladness leaves you,
And fame’s bright bonfire does at last expire.
Be humble when your life-day sinks in twilight,
When the last flower dies that you admire.
Be humble when your youthful hopes are scattered,
And Heaven’s chastisements they sear and strike.
When the last star upon life’s sky is fading
Then be thou humble, and be glad belike.”

Oh, yah! Whimpering cats! Erland felt the blood rushing to his face, he got so mad. Now, honestly, didn’t this stuff sound like a licking and you crying for more? It made one sick inside! He didn’t care even if it was printed in a religious book! Who wanted to be humble? Ha! Not *he*!

“Be humble when your youthful hopes are scattered . . .”

So, they wanted to keep him down, did they? Moses! Wouldn’t he have liked to choke the fellow who wrote that! Darn it! If anyone tried to scatter *his* hopes he certainly would give them a pretty stiff fight! Ha! Telling people to be glad when everything goes wrong! Sniffing Adeline! Didn’t he have

a right as well as everyone else!—You be nice now and sit here in this corner and lick your lollypop! Yea! And let the other fellows do all the big things! . . . No, siree! Not for him! Not on your life. . . .

“Erland! Erland! What are ye doing in there? What are ye raving about?” Grandma put her head in through the door opening and stared at him.

“Oh, nothing,” he said, embarrassed. But when grandma had gone back to the kitchen he spat on the page. Not much, not so that it really got wet, but just a little to show how much *he* cared to be humble.

He opened the book at another place. Here was something by a man named Victor Hugo. Erland wondered who he was. And why had he dropped his last name? Both Victor and Hugo were Christian names.

“I love laughter, not the ironical, sarcastic, scornful laughter, but the good honest laughter which opens mouth and heart, which shows the soul and at the same time the teeth’s row of pearls.”

“Hm.” Erland glanced into Little Aunt’s mirror and grinned stiffly, then with a sigh he again opened the book. ’Twas getting to be quite a game.

“Freely ye received, freely give.”

This wasn’t quite clear to him. Now, let’s see—what is it one gets for nothing and which can be given away? Not food and clothes, because one has to work like the dickens for that. . . . Sunshine? No, one can’t give that away. . . .

Funny, but there must be something, otherwise they wouldn't have printed it in a book. Let's see—water? Yes, water one could get for nothing from the sea, but who cared for that? Or perhaps there was something else he couldn't think of just now. Maybe he was getting sleepy. But he wanted to try the book once more.

"God created the iron but he didn't create the shackles."

Yah, hm. He put the book back on the shelf and scanned the other titles. There was one book called *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was a very big book and the illustrations were fascinating, and so he looked at these for a while.

Little Aunt had a goodly collection of Bibles and psalm books, and as Erland was rummaging about on the shelves he found one small Bible which seemed to have slipped back of the other books and was lying in the narrow space near the wall. Erland picked it up and meant to put it in place among the rest of the volumes, but noticing several book marks jutting out from between the leaves he opened the book and glanced at one of the pages. Little Aunt had underlined a passage there and marked some of the following with a pencil cross.

Let him kiss me with the kisses
of his mouth;
For thy love is better than wine.

Behold, thou art fair, my beloved,
yea, pleasant:
Also our couch is green.

For I am sick from love.
His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand doth embrace me.

My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and
come away.

By night on my bed
I sought him whom my soul loveth:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem
If ye find my beloved,
That ye tell him, that I am sick
from love.

I am my beloved's:
And his desire is toward me.

His left hand should be under my
head
And his right hand should embrace
me.

Set me as a seal upon thy heart,
As a seal upon thine arm:
For love is strong as death;
Jealousy is cruel as Sheol;
The flashes thereof are flashes of
fire.

Our Daily Bread

Make haste, my beloved,
And be thou like to a roe or to a
young hart
Upon the mountains of spices.

Oh, but this was nice, thought Erland. He liked the sound of the lines and mumbled some of them aloud to himself, trying to make his voice deep and sonorous.

Make haste, my beloved,
And be thou like to a roe or to a
young hart
Upon the mountains of spices.

And be thou like to a roe or to a
young hart
Upon the mountains of spices.

Upon the mountains of spices. It sounded just like music. 'Twas wonderful! He would himself like to write things like that with great feeling to them that made your spine creep. He wished he hadn't given God his poetry. Right now he felt he could have written something great, something with a sound like "Upon the mountains of spices."

Still waters touched
By silvery moonbeams.
And hushed is the night
Below star-studded sky.

Now here were some lines he could have used if only he had dared to invent a few more. Then he would have had another poem in his collection. He sighed and sat staring at

the wall. Little Aunt's room was cozy and warm and soft with lamplight, but 'twas pitch black outside. "Grandma!" he called into the next room. "Isn't Aunt Ida coming back soon?"

"She ought to have been here already," said grandma. "Don't know what's keeping her. Ye know," she added, "I think ye had better get on yer way home. It's pretty late and ye have a long walk."

Yah, and so Erland went and got his overcoat. Grandma put a big red apple into one of his pockets. "An' here's the jacket for yer mother," she said and gave him a parcel. "Don't lose it now. An' tell Peter I'll be coming t'see ye all next Sunday when Hanna's home."

Yah, yah. Erland got his green sled and set out for home. But when he reached the end of the alley he met Ida's friends who were on their way to grandma's house. "You run back and tell grandma that Ida will be a little late coming home," they instructed him. "She said she wanted to go and visit an old sick woman she knows."

Erland ran back and delivered the message to grandma. "Now, who can that be?" she wondered. "She didn't tell me. Yah, yah." She waddled up to a closet and fetched another apple which she gave Erland. So now he had one in each pocket.

And so, pulling his sled after him, he again went on his way. The night was cold and crisp with myriads of stars overhead.

It would take him at least an hour to get home. He was feeling restless, his thoughts skipped and tripped over each other in his brain.—Now suppose a run-away horse came this way, dragging a sleigh or a jolting cart after him with a

screaming girl in it. Ay, Erland knew what he would do. He would start running as fast as he could and get up the same speed as the horse and then he would grab him by the bit and hang there till the horse got tired, or maybe he would crawl up on the horse's back and seize the reins and hold him in. He would do that. And they might bump into a lamp post or something and Erland would get hurt, perhaps in the arm, and the ambulance would come and a doctor in a white jacket would operate on him right there in the street with all the people looking on.

... It hurt terribly, but neither with sound nor gesture did Erland betray his pain.

"Look how pale he is!" someone in the crowd was saying. 'Twas a girl. "He must be suffering terribly!"

"Yah, his face is white as a sheet."

But Erland didn't move a muscle.

Then through the crowd broke a tall man and a small, slim girl. "He's a hero," said the man. And 'twas Kaufman. "He has saved my daughter's life."

The doctor took a deep stitch in Erland's arm and the people pressed forward to look. But now Rachel was here and her dark eyes were filling with tears. "Thank God," she whispered, "I've found you at last! Why did you leave the store? I was so disappointed when I came there and you were gone. . . ."

Oh, it was a cold night and the dark-blue sky was strewn with innumerable glistening stars. Erland trotted on, tugging at the sled and sometimes making it shoot way ahead of him. Now he began thinking of the shop and the salesman and his filthy talk, and a lump came into his throat and that choking fear came over him again. Thank God 'twas Sunday

tomorrow so he didn't have to go to the shop! He had a whole day free to himself. The thought made him feel immeasurably happy. A horse-drawn sleigh with jingling bells glided past him. It sounded so solemn and holiday-like.

He wished mother could have been home when he got back. Now everything seemed dreary and dull again. He felt so lonely. And the stars were so high up; it made one feel so small.—There was the big dipper. 'Twas a chariot. He drove it all across the sky. "Don't drive so fast!" Rachel whispered, alarmed, leaning forward and touching his arm. But he only laughed and cracked his whip and drove on all along the Milky Way to the World's End.

ONE day, two days, and three, and then—in the evening in front of the warm stove Peter and the children were gathered round someone who was saying: ". . . and so he came to her every night, but he always left before dawn, and he forbade her to bring any light into the house and look at his face, 'For then,' he said, 'all is lost!' . . ."

Ay, Hanna was home from the hospital now and telling Småland stories. The light from the open fire door fell on her face and, of course, it was a little pale and her eyes still had dark shadows around them and she looked rather thin, but somehow it just made her prettier, Erland thought.

"Yah," said Hanna, "if she looked at his face then all was lost. But oh, she loved him! Never had she dreamt she could care for any man that much! And he was so strange—sometimes so gentle and tender with her, and then again his mood was stormy and wild, but she loved him then also, and oh, perhaps, even more!"

"But as time went by more and more did she wonder about how he looked. She touched his face with her hands during

the night and tried to imagine his features; she fondled his thick longish hair and wondered what color it might be. 'Just let me look at you once,' she begged him.—'Once—just a second, dear.' But, 'No,' he said. 'Never!' Then she burst into tears. 'What woman,' she sobbed, 'was ever thus cursed? Not even once allowed to gaze upon the face of her beloved!'

"And so he came to her in the night after dark and always left before daybreak. And the weeks went and months passed, but then—no longer could the young woman contain herself. 'What manner of lover is he,' she muttered, 'if I cannot look at him once?' And the more she thought of it the more curious she became. 'What is he hiding?' she said to herself. 'Is it bad scars, perhaps, cuts from the curved sabers of the Infidel? Perhaps he is just back from the Turkish War? The foolish fellow! Does he not know in what manner a woman can kiss and caress a scar on a man's brow, a cut on his cheek! I want to look and see what it is.'"

Hanna paused. And all the children took a long, deep breath, their eyes on their mother's face. She was gazing dreamily into the glowing coals, a gentle sadness softening her features. "She wanted to look at his face," she murmured. "She was sick with love."

Erland gave a start and glanced at his mother. For her last words called up an echo of the lines Little Aunt had marked in the Bible.

For I am sick from love.
Upon the mountains of spices.

"Yah," Hanna sighed and brushed a strand of hair away from her eyes. "She wanted to see his face. I will hide a

candle under the bed,' she said to herself. 'And when he is fast asleep after midnight then I will light it and have a quick look—just one, surely that cannot do any harm.'

"And she did as she said. She lay still in his arms that night till she knew by his breathing that he was asleep and then she quietly reached for the candle and lit it and held it up to look at him. And 'twas all she could do not to cry aloud with delight, for more handsome a man had never embraced a maiden. His long, wild, tumultuous hair had a strange copper-red sheen. And he had a pale, strong face that made her think of a prince or a king, but even as he slept he looked utterly sad. Oh, he was a goodly man to behold, and the young woman nearly forgot herself and cried out from the joy of being loved by one such as he. But in her excitement she tilted the candle a little and a drop fell on her lover's breast.

"Instantly he awoke. He rose and cried, 'What have you done! What have you done! Now all is lost! Did I not warn you? Why could you not wait? Oh, with your love and faith I had hoped to redeem my soul!' And with that he sprang out of the bed and disappeared right through the wall with flames and fumes of sulphur following him, and the poor woman dropped to the floor in a faint, for now, God be her witness, she knew whom she had given her love to!"

—Yah, that was the tale. They all remained silent for a long while. Britta blinked rapidly.—Gosh, but those stork-stories seemed old-fashioned now! This was a real good tale. Little Nils stared somberly and wide-eyed into the fire where blue and red flames popped and flickered.

But Peter silently shook his head.—Some tales to be telling the children! He glanced furtively at them.—How much did they really understand? Ay, that Hanna! And he stole a look

at her.—Those girls from Småland! One almost felt uneasy at times, so God help and forgive! These stories they told! How much was made up, and how much was true?

—Småland stories!

But just the same it was good to have Hanna back home again.

45

AY, TROUBLES are just like that—popping up where you least expect them! “Peter,” said Hanna one night as he came home from work, “the Wise One is dead!”

Without a word Peter dropped onto a chair and sat staring at Hanna. He looked quite shaken.

Hanna bit her lips.—Yah, wasn’t this a calamity! Dying like that and leaving Peter with an extra inch! “And the worst is,” she said, “that inch might grow on you! Such inches will if they’re not removed. And then what’ll we do? And having spent all this money!”

Yah, what was to be done? The Wise One’s daughter let it be known she would continue her mother’s work and that she was in possession of all the recipes and secret formulas, but neither Peter nor Hanna had much confidence in her. She looked just like any other young, healthy housewife. No beaked occult nose had she, no shrewd eye and no oily parchment skin. In short, she didn’t look wise at all, just simple and content.

“Perhaps we should try a doctor,” Peter suggested sheep-

ishly. The news of the Wise One's death had given him a look as if all the three inches were back on him again.

"A doctor?" Hanna repeated scornfully, curling her lip.

"Yah," said Peter, his face flushing. "I thought—maybe if he caught that inch in time he might . . ."

"Ach!" Hanna interrupted him. "I'll speak to old Fru Karlsson about it and see what she says. I think maybe she knows another Wise One. She mightn't be as clever as Fru Blom, but considering the worst is done . . ." She was interrupted by a quick ring of the door bell. "Fru Hammar! Fru Hammar!" someone was calling out in the hall in a most anxious voice.

"Yah, come in," Hanna called back. "That's Fru Lundström," she remarked to Peter.

Fru Lundström came running into the kitchen, her face tense and pale. She squinted her eyes against the gas light. "Anton has come back!" she gasped.

"Anton . . . ?" Hanna stared wide-eyed at her neighbor whose son Anton had suddenly left for America four years ago. And like many of those who went he wrote one or two letters and then wasn't heard from any more. A tragic thing had happened to him a few months before he left Sweden. For one night when he and his younger brother Sven were ice-skating on the Willow Lakes the ice broke under Anton, and when Sven came to his rescue he went down, too. Anton was saved but Sven drowned. After that Anton never seemed like his old self but went around alone and brooded. When he left for America many people thought the change might do him good.—And now he was back.

"Fru Hammar, come!" begged Fru Lundström. "He's so strange. We were just having supper when the door opened

and he came in and sat down and didn't say a word, just as if he had only been away a few minutes. . . ."

Hanna glanced meaningly at Peter, then made haste and hurried after Fru Lundström downstairs and across the yard and up to their flat in another wing of the house. As they entered the room, there was Anton sitting on a chair and staring at the floor. He didn't even look up, seemingly entirely absorbed in his thoughts.

"Good day, Anton," said Hanna and made her voice sound cheerful.

Anton regarded her with a blank look in his eyes. "Good day," he said quietly, then went on staring at the floor.

A shiver ran down Hanna's back. For Anton looked so very strange. His thin carved face showed signs of pain and suffering, and yet it bore a certain calm, as if a transparent veil were covering his features and softening their expression. "How are you, Anton?" Hanna asked, mastering her nervousness.

"I'm well," he said gently, but without looking up.

Hanna threw a furtive glance at Fru Lundström, who stood wringing her hands, fighting back her tears.

But presently they saw Anton raising his head, attentive, as if he had heard someone calling him. His eyes were gazing far away. "Yah, yah," he said and nodded. A sad tender smile passed over his chiseled face. He rose and stepped to the door.

"Where are you going, Anton?" his mother asked tremulously, putting her hand on his arm.

But he did not seem to notice her. He walked past her, his eyes gazing into a far distance and his face strained with attentive listening.

He walked quickly down the stairs, Hanna and his mother following, both pale and trembling.

Apparently Anton did not know they were there. Emerging from the stairs he hurriedly crossed the yard and passed through the gates. But out on the street he stopped. The rapt attention faded from his countenance and he stood motionless, gazing before him.

He remained thus for a long time. And when the short-lived animation had fled from his face it left in its wake only that sadness which seemed as if cast into his features.

A bunch of street urchins with their sleds gathered around the strange man, gaping open-mouthed at him and giggling at his peculiar behavior. Fru Lundström took a step forward to speak to her son but Hanna held her back. "Wait," she whispered. "It might be dangerous to speak to him now."

Anton moved. He turned his head and looked with inward-turned eyes in another direction. Presently the eerie smile again flitted across his face. He nodded. "Yah, yah . . ." The smile faded. His face was once more a blank. Then he turned round and when he saw his mother he spoke to her in the most normal way. "There's snow on the street," he said.

"Yah, Anton. . . ." Tears were streaming down Fru Lundström's wrinkled cheeks.

Anton again stood still, his head slightly bent forward. Then he went back into the yard and up the stairs and sat down on the chair.

“Is this the soldier’s way?
Is this the soldier’s manner?
Treating us like slaves,
To serve his hated banner.
. . .”

WHEN Erland had been employed in the shop for some-time Mattson put him to work opposite Frans at the polishing bench, and another boy was hired to help with the grounding.

Erland got a rack for himself and Frans taught him how to polish mouldings and make imitations of different kinds of wood. First the grounded mouldings were covered with a foundation color—red if mahogany was to be imitated, brown for walnut and oak. The color was applied by means of a sponge moved along the moulding with little twists and jerks of the hand so as to produce the effect of wood structure. In order to get an imitation of mahogany the wet color was worked with special brushes. Next the color was allowed to dry and after that covered with three successive layers of

shellac. Then the polishing began. The mouldings were tacked on to the sharp nails of a rack, eight or ten at a time, and the polisher walked back and forth in front of the bench, pressing a shellac-soaked ball of cotton-stuffed linen against the mouldings.

While it was still a novelty to him Erland found it interesting to work out good imitations of wood grains with knots and gnarls. And it gave him quite a thrill to polish the mouldings into a rich, deep luster. On some mouldings the polish was toned down with pulverized pumice stone till the surface had a cool, dignified appearance very pleasant to the eye.

And the tall mild-mannered Frans was busy at the other side of the bench, doing the same work day after day, year out, year in. His only diversion was on Saturday night when he went to Freja Hall, or in the summer to the People's Park. Then he danced and had a few drinks, and afterwards, when he told Erland about it, he in his shy way tried to make out he had been a very devil of a fellow. Not that he told any ribald stories, but he took on a secret air and had a way of chuckling knowingly to himself as if holding back a great deal concerning the remarkable adventures that had befallen him on Saturday night. Now and then he interrupted his rushing back and forth before the polishing rack and glanced at his face in the small piece of cracked mirror he had fastened to the wall. He knitted his brow and moved his fingers concernedly across his sallow skin as if wishing his complexion were more clear and healthy-looking. Then with a sigh he would again go back to his shellac and his mouldings.

“Is this the soldier’s way?
Is this the soldier’s manner?

Our Daily Bread

Treating us like slaves,
To serve his hated banner.
...."

And Mattsson was slaving away at his machine, grounding mouldings for many of which he was never paid. His voice sounded more than ordinarily hopeless these days, for his young daughter was rapidly sinking, consumption claiming her as it had claimed the three other children. And when nearing the end, they all showed the same symptoms of fretfulness and bad temper although firmly convinced they would soon recover. They wanted many things—a bracelet, or a ring, a book which was never opened, a photograph frame to have on the small glass-topped table beside the bed, a string of beads. . . . It seemed as if in spite of their belief in returning health they were permeated by the sense of Death and reached out for the fair things of this world while these might yet be fondled.

One day when Mattsson returned from a visit to the hospital he showed Frans a small fancy penknife. "She wanted to have one," he said. "And I bought this one. Look—inlaid with mother-of-pearl and everything. But she wouldn't take it. Said she wanted a better one, and now I'll have to buy her another."

On his next visit to the hospital he brought Dagmar a new knife which she accepted and said she liked much better. And three days later she died.

When Mattsson came back from the hospital that afternoon he sent for a bottle of brandy and closed himself in his office for the day. Frans and Erland worked on silently, speaking only at long intervals in hushed voices. At six o'clock they

quit working and made ready to go home. They washed the shellac from their hands with denatured alcohol and removed their aprons. Then Frans turned down the light.

The shop now lay in almost complete darkness. Only some pale gleams from the spring evening outside fell in through the windows and played fantastically on the stacks of mouldings that stood leaning against the racks in black, solid masses like heavy buttresses of ancient walls. Here and there the curved polished surface of a moulding caught the creeping light and reflected it back in a long gleaming streak as if a sword or a glittering rapier had been hidden there. The heavy mass of the grounding machine loomed sinister and threatening among the shadows; with the wheel on top and the rough timbers it took on the semblance of an instrument of torture.

Frans and Erland groped their way toward the exit. Frans halted at the office door. Mattsson was in there but had not shown himself during the entire afternoon.

"I think perhaps we had better see what he is doing," said Frans. He tried the lock, but the door was closed. "Mattsson!" he called and rapped at the door. But there was no response.

Frans was undecided what to do. "We can't go and leave him like this," he said to Erland. "I think it's best I push the door in; it's easy." He put his foot against it, near the lock, and gave a good thrust. The flimsy lock gave away and the door flew open.

Erland remained in the door-opening while Frans entered the half-dark room. Mattsson was lying face down across the desk, his blue serge crumpled and soiled. The empty brandy bottle lay overturned among some papers on the desk.

Frans went and touched his employer on the shoulder. "Mattsson," he said gently.

Mattsson was almost unconscious from all the brandy he had been drinking. He rolled his head heavily on the desk and gave a deep groan. From the door Erland saw two small penknives lying on the desk, the elusive half-light gleaming on their silver mountings and the mother-of-pearl. They both looked alike, but one of them Dagmar had rejected with tears and protestations, the other one she had received with joy and fondled till her hands suddenly had become still.

Frans spoke again. His soft voice had a strange full quality in the dusk. "Mattsson," he said. "Mattsson."

Mattsson tried to raise his head but it was heavy and dazed and again fell onto the desk. His face looked white and wasted and haggard.

Frans bent over him. As he did so his lank hair fell forward on both sides of his forehead. "Mattsson," he said softly, "I'll stay here with you." He turned to Erland. "I think you had better go home."

Erland nodded and made his way to the exit, then stepped out on the pitch-black landing. He walked down the stairs, and no sound reached him from the shop above.

As he came out on the street he at once felt a breath of spring in the air. The twilight was deepening to dusk, the traffic slowing down and workers returning to their homes. A hush spread over the streets, over the city. The Spirit of Day once more fled westward and night came with sleep for those whose hearts were not too much troubled.

When he reached home Erland met Anna Bergsson on the stairs. He had not seen her for a long time because she had been visiting a relative in Copenhagen.

"Good day, Erland," she said gaily, her voice friendly and intimate in the dusk. She had changed much during these last

months. There was a fullness and a warmth about her which attracted Erland but at the same time made him feel abashed and shy. She made as if to stop and talk to him but he hurried past her, his heart pounding violently. In a quick glance he had glimpsed her smooth round face framed by chestnut-colored hair parted in the middle and drawn back into a knot in the nape of her white neck.

He bolted upstairs, not daring to look back. Recollections of the smutty talk from the shop hammered in his brain. On reaching the landing he pulled the door open and entered the flat. His sisters were in the living-room doing their home work. "Good evening," he said and stepped hurriedly to the window which he opened, bending far out and looking down into the street.

Anna emerged from the gates and walked away in the dusk with a light step, her skirts swinging about her knees. Erland kept looking after her until she had reached the end of the street and turned the corner. Then he went into the kitchen and sat on a chair, gazing out through the window into the shadowy forms of the beech tree. The kitchen was dark but he did not care to light the lamp. Hanna was away doing someone's washing and would not be home until later. Peter was working overtime.

He sat watching the bluish dusk descending over the tree and filtering between the black naked twigs. The silence seemed charged with prompting and urging. He half expected a summoning call from out of the dusk and quiet.

47

DURING the following months a more than commonly threatening note rose above the clang and clamor in the labor market. *Lockout, lockout, strike, lockout* had been the words most often staring into one's eyes out of the newspapers these last few years, but the general public had begun to accept the matter as mere routine not to any noteworthy degree affecting one's way of living. Of late, however, the rumblings had grown louder and more sinister, and that a great fight was in preparation could no longer escape the notice even of those who dwelt far apart from the constant warfare.

Flint Street was battle territory. Housewives coming to borrow a twenty-five öre piece or a half-loaf of bread one or two days before pay-day—that Hanna found nothing out of the ordinary, for when people once began buying on credit they were in for it and always lagging behind. No, but when on Monday a neighbor already had not a crumb of bread to eat, then one might know things were bad, indeed.

One Monday night in July, while Hanna was clearing off the table after supper, the door bell rang, and when Marta

went to the door there was the smallish Krok asking if he could have a word with Hanna or Peter.

"Good evening, Krok," said Hanna. "Come right in."

"Good evening." Krok stepped to the kitchen doorway where he stood fumbling with his battered hat. He cleared his throat. "Hope I'm not intrudin'," he said, looking at Peter who sat in his corner reading the newspaper.

"No, not all." Peter folded his paper and put it at his side on the table. "Take a seat, Krok," he said.

Krok hesitatingly went and sat down on the sofa. He seemed worried and nervous and kept on brushing with the back of his hand at his scrubby moustache.

He looked up at Peter, and then he turned his eyes to Hanna. "Hm—. To tell ye straight—I—I came to ask if ye could see yer way t'lend me one krona. I'll pay it back as soon as I start workin' again. . . ." He flushed and took to staring at the floor while he continued in a low tense voice, "We haven't a bite t'eat in th' house. . . . It's worst with little Erik . . . he doesn't understand. . . ."

Hanna glanced at Peter who answered her with a nod. "Yah, Krok," she said and went to the closet where she took out the purse she always kept in a corner on one of the shelves. She opened the purse slowly and peered into it, her face serious. She took one krona out of the purse and gave it to Krok. "Of course," she said, "it's hard for all of us but . . . I guess you're having it very difficult now."

"Thanks, thanks, Fru Hammar," said Krok with great warmth as he received the krona. "I can't tell ye how much I appreciate this. An' I hope it won't be long before I can pay ye back. . . . Yah, it's tough. God only knows what we'll do

if things don't change for th' better. Th' factory closed three weeks ago an' I haven't had one öre comin' t'me since."

"Yah," said Peter gravely. "And it doesn't look as if things would ease up any." He made a gesture at the paper. "Thirteen thousand men locked out already, and now the employers have decided to start a mass lockout over the whole country."

Krok nodded. "Yah," he said with a sigh. "I'm afraid it's goin' t'be a regular showdown now."

Hanna came with a dish of stewed rhubarb which she gave to Krok. "Taste this," she said. "We had some for supper." She poured a little milk over it.

"Thanks, thanks." Krok glanced up. "Oh, but I didn't mean t'come here an' eat yer food, too. It's bad enough t'be takin' yer money." He laughed, embarrassed.

"Oh, you're welcome to it," said Hanna. "Thank God we still have enough to eat." She sat down on the sofa, resting her hands in her lap. "But tell me," she said anxiously, looking from Krok to Peter and then back to Krok again. "What is wrong again now that all these people should be thrown out of work? What's the matter? I don't understand."

"Hm," said Krok, putting the dish of rhubarb down beside him on the sofa. "It's simple enough, Fru Hammar. Th' unions have made some headway these last couple o' years an' wages have gone up a little. Now when th' depression came th' employers thought 'twas a good time t'press th' pay down again. That's all there's to it." He looked at Peter to see whether he agreed.

Peter nodded. "Yah—that's right. And they're trying to break up the unions."

Hanna's eyes were blazing. "So they think this is a good time to bring wages down, do they? And who is there having

too much of anything, I'd like to know? I ask—how many are having enough? Slaving night and day, trying to make things go! Lying awake nights worrying where will one get money for the rent, how will one manage this or that! Never a moment of peace! And then they want to take away the little you have! God will punish them!" She clenched her hands and stared despairingly through the window out into the yard where the tree fluttered its leaves in a warm evening breeze.

They all sat silent, pondering, grave-faced and serious.

"Eat your rhubarb, Krok," said Hanna with a sigh.

"Hm—yah . . ." Krok glanced at her. "Hm—ye don't mind if I bring it along an' eat it upstairs, d'ye?"

Hanna rose silently and filled another dish with rhubarb. "You eat yours now," she said. "And take this for little Erik." And she added proudly: "Peter raised the rhubarb himself on the koloni."

48

GARMENT WORKERS IN LOCKOUT.

THE THREATENING MASS LOCKOUT!

Secretariat of the S. F. of L. in Conference with Union Delegates.

WORKERS IN PAPER PULP INDUSTRY LOCKED OUT!

STILL ONE MORE LOCKOUT?

600 Saw Mill Workers Affected.

AND that's th' kind 'o' stuff you all stand for!" carpenter Fridman yelled, brandishing a crumpled newspaper in the air and glaring at the group of neighbors gathered in the yard to discuss the fast-moving events.

"Sure!" he went on, again flinging out his arm. "Let 'em throw you on the street! What d'you care? You've got plenty o' money in the bank, haven't you? You don't have t'work. You just let those goddam delegates kid you along. Those yellow bastards! Who are they, anyway? I ask you! A lot o' crooks an' traitors, that's what they are! They're sellin' you all out to th' bosses an'—"

"Ach! Shut up!" Gren, the tanner growled. "You don't know what you're talking about!" Gren was a large, solid-looking man with a kindly face. But now he was flushed with anger. "The delegates are doing all they can," he said. "And you know it!"

"Yeah—is that so?" Fridman brayed, excitedly shaking his fist. "An' then, why are we losing out all th' time, I'd like to know?"

"Because . . ." Gren began, but Fridman interrupted him. "Because what? We were going strong enough till a couple o' years ago, weren't we?"

"Yah!" Gren roared to make himself heard. "Because the country had good times and conditions were favorable and the unions could make some headway!"

"Conditions!" The carpenter laughed sarcastically, "Conditions—you blockhead . . ."

"Lissen here, you-u!" Gren snarled and pushed his face up close to Fridman's. "Who do you think you're talking to, anyway! Hold your gab, will you?"

"Wilhelm! Wilhelm!" The tanner's wife cried, tugging at her husband's arm. She was a thin, bony woman with a gloomy face and a hook nose. "Wilhelm!" she screamed. "Don't start a fight! Don't lissen to that insulting ass!" She gave a contemptuous sniff and tossed a maddened glance at the raw-boned carpenter.

He glared back at her savagely as she drew away with her growling husband. "Go hide your mopey mug!" he snorted. He slapped the newspaper with his big flat hand and looked about him for approval. But the other tenants paid no more attention to him. They had drawn a few steps aside and were

in low, tense voices discussing the monster lockout that was rolling up to crush them.

“Traitors! That’s what they are!” Fridman shouted. “Crooks an’ thieves!—They’re selling you out, th’ bastards!”

No one answered. Only the venerable old beech tree rustled its leaves gently above the excited carpenter and over the small group of workers who stood in the twilight, wondering anxiously what tomorrow would bring.

49

NEXT day was Saturday. The beautiful warm July evening found Flint Street in a state of high tension, as the papers carried the most distressing news. More thousands of men had been locked out; strike-breaking organizations were being formed by the employers; and the assassination by anarchists of a general of high standing was seized upon by the authorities as an excuse for urging various exemption laws to hamper and distract organized labor in the struggle for its rights.

The warring parties had made several efforts at negotiation, but without result. And now Capitalism put before Labor a final ultimatum: On Monday there would be a nationwide mass lockout unless the workers before then accepted the humiliating terms offered as a condition for peace.

Labor was facing a great test. Every man and woman knew that momentous events were ahead which would deeply affect their lives.

On Sunday morning Peter was up early, as usual, making coffee for Hanna and the children. He sang softly, "Calm lies the sea, and bright stars twinkle," But his voice sounded sad.

And when he had brought Hanna the tray he sat down on the edge of the bed, looking silently at the floor.

"You don't think they'll change their mind, maybe, and not start the lockout tomorrow?" Hanna asked.

Peter shook his head. "No, I don't think so."

Hanna put down the cup. She absently fingered the spoon. "God help all poor people," she said tremulously under her breath.

Peter had no reply.

The morning was very still. Bright slanting July sunshine began to creep across the red brick wall of the tenement houses across the street. Presently a woman's fretting voice rose from the flat below.

"Is that Fru Svensson?" Peter asked.

"Yah," said Hanna with a sigh. "Pity her poor husband. I don't think he'll live much longer. He looks like a corpse."

"But why did they let him out of the hospital?"

"Oh, I think the doctors saw there was no hope for him. So he might as well die home. His lungs are entirely gone."

The baby awoke in its cradle and began to cry. Hanna rose and took the child up in her arms, rocking it gently. "And you don't think your shop will be in the lockout?" she asked.

"No, it doesn't look like it. You know, Krasse is not a member of any employer's association. We were talking about it yesterday. Volmer said Krasse never liked to have trouble of this sort."

Hanna seemed somewhat relieved. "Perhaps it will soon blow over, anyway," she said, hopefully.

"Yah—perhaps." Peter looked at the children who were still asleep. "I'll wake them and give them their coffee," he said and walked out into the kitchen.

50

THE crash came on Monday. Groups of workers in their awkward Sunday-best and with newspapers in hand could be seen everywhere in the streets. These were the men thrown out of work in the great lockout begun that day. Their solemn faces bore witness to their realization that this was not just one more conflict such as they had grown accustomed to during these last few years, but a fateful event of great magnitude.

The entire front-page of the *Arbetet* was crowded with news about the tremendous happening, and in a three-and-a-half-column editorial the subject was further elucidated.

One of the men on the sidewalk took a red handkerchief from his trouser pocket and mopped his face. "Jesus, it's close," he mumbled.

But that was not true. The day was not very warm, for a cool breeze came wafting in over the city from the sea. Another worker came nearer to the fact when he burst out: "The devil—but doesn't it choke ye t'stand by like this an' just let 'em kick ye?"

"They're out for murder this time," one man said.

"Jesus, this rotten country! An' those fellers know they've th' government back o' them. They're nobody's fools, take it from me. They'll get you, an' they'll get me. It's money that's got th' say, here as well as everywhere else. If you got th' cash who th' hell can touch ye?"

Flint Street was like a besieged city that day. One calculated the enemy's strength and tried to guess at his next move. In large crowds the workers walked to the nearby People's House to attend the meetings and read the latest telegrams from different parts of the country. The street outside the building was black with a milling crowd.

The housewives stayed home, attending to the daily routine of their duties while waiting anxiously for the return of their husbands from the union meetings, and hoping against reason that the men would bring good news with them.

As Hanna went down in the yard in the afternoon to empty a pail of garbage she saw Krok hurrying from his stairway and making for the gates. "Good day," he mumbled, without stopping. He avoided looking at Hanna. She noticed he was hugging a parcel to his side, something wrapped in old newspapers, but she did not let on that she saw.—Ay, but she couldn't help wondering whether it was the wall clock or the lamp Krok was carrying away; the parcel looked heavy. At any rate the pawnbroker would be doing business these days, she knew that.

After she had gone upstairs she sent little Nils to buy a copy of the *Arbetet* which she spread out on the kitchen table. Her eye was immediately caught by an ominous headline in black letters: "Preparations Are Being Made." The article began by stating that "Intimidation and lies have always been the most effective working methods of the Right. . . . Each

and every alert observer will find that the Right these days is busy preparing people for a little of everything." And at the end was the question, "What is now in preparation?"

Hanna heaved a deep sigh. She had no idea what they were preparing. She knew only one thing. In order to live one had to work. Then why should people be closed out of factories and shops all over the country? Did the rich people want the poor ones to die? She didn't understand. Why were human beings so cruel to one another? She had never seen anything but poverty and hard struggle about her. Now it looked like preparation for death. They would all starve if they were not allowed to work. She thought of the little children swarming on the street—all the pale-faced children many of whom had never been outside the city limits. Hanna put her hand to her breast. Almighty God, what would become of them all? And again that thought struck her which so often had flashed through her mind: She and Peter and all the other workers, they would need so little in order to be happy. Just enough to cover rent and taxes and a little for decent clothes and simple nourishing food, that was all. Just that. They did not ask for luxuries. And she didn't mind working hard. If only they could feel a little more peace in their breasts. 'Twas this constant anxiety that made life such a burden. That's why they got cranky with each other sometimes and were unfriendly—because they were harassed and fearful. A little easing up, and people would be kind and forbearing, she thought.

Now she wondered uneasily whether the koloni could be reckoned as an unnecessary expense. But then, so many workers had those little gardens, and think of all the things they had grown there! Rhubarb, potatoes, beets and many other

vegetables. And even so, Peter needed something to cheer him. Whatever would he do if he didn't have that patch of ground? Hanna grew defiant. They would keep the koloni! So God forgive! One must have one bright spot in this world to rest one's eye upon.

She again looked at the caption, "Preparations Are Being Made." And it struck her it would be a good thing if people would mind their own business and not go around preparing trouble for others.

When Peter came home in the evening she asked him: "Can you tell me what they mean by this—'Preparations Are Being Made'?"

"Oh, it's about the lockout," he said. He looked tired and gloomy as he sat reading that front page with all the bad news.

But presently his expression brightened. "Hanna—look at this," he said eagerly.

She leaned forward over his shoulder and read a short article tucked in with the depressing reports about the lockout.

BY AEROPLANE ACROSS THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

A Sensational Development in Aviation History

Journey lasted 23 minutes

Bleriot Honored

Yesterday morning at 4:30 Bleriot took to the air in his aeroplane *Calais* and landed at 4:53 on a meadow near Dover.

Peter looked up at Hanna, a light in his eyes. "I don't care what they do or say!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "But great things are coming! The world is progressing! We are going forward to meet better times!"

51

CAPITALISM had given labor a stunning blow. But Labor struck back with the proclamation of a General Strike. In a manifesto issued by The Swedish Federation of Labor the secretariat reviewed the situation and pointed out that the workers had been forced to resort to these measures by the employers' unscrupulous attacks on the labor organizations and by the ceaseless lockouts which had harassed the workers beyond endurance. The date for the strike was set for Wednesday, August 4, and the manifesto ended with the words, "we are fully aware of the great sacrifices being demanded from the workers, but the responsibility for this conflict falls on the employers whose inconsiderate tactics have brought on the crisis. We appeal to each and everyone not to resort to any form of violence but instead to act calmly and coolly, with the knowledge that nothing less than the entire Swedish trade unionism is at stake."

The strike proclamation was received by the workers with an outburst of cheers and enthusiasm. You could hear carpen-

ter Fridman a block away, braying about what they would do to the "lousy bastards."

But soberer elements, also, felt relieved that the final clash at last had come. Their gloomy faces became animated with fighting spirit. "By Jesus, we'll show them!" they exclaimed.

"Can't show 'em much," a pessimist retorted. "They're stronger'n we are."

"I don't care—Jesus, but I want to stand up for my rights! You feel like a sucker having your bottom spanked all the time."

And this was the prevailing sentiment—to be allowed to fight it out and for once dare a battle for something more than just the hourly wage. The workers felt that this time they were fighting for an almost sacred cause—the right to Collective Bargaining.

Even the moderate and cautious tanner Gren raised his voice and spoke heatedly. "Are we slaves that we should take anything that is thrown to us? Are we not human beings even though we are poor? Have we not self-respect? Are we not entitled to organize and meet our employers as man to man and talk things over squarely?"

There were five days until the great strike would begin. Now the whole country was thrown into a fever of excitement. The government called out troops and the middle class organized a guard, the ostensible purpose of which was to "assist society in a fully neutral manner" but which busied itself chiefly with strike-breaking activities. Business boomed as never before, since those who had money made a frantic rush to supply themselves with provisions to last for months ahead. It was a scramble that put even the Christmas rush to

shame. All the big stores worked night and day, trying to fill the orders that kept pouring in on them in a steady stream.

One day Hanna paid twenty-nine öre for a small batch of potatoes, two days later the price was thirty-five, then it rose to forty. Milk, butter and bread, eggs and meat—prices were sky-rocketing. Hanna grew panicky. She figured and added and subtracted on the slip of paper where she kept her accounts, but at last she had to give it all up in despair.

Large masses of the population were seized by a veritable hysteria. In the capital all ammunition stores were emptied of their supplies, the middle class arming itself with guns and pistols, preparing to meet the looting and murderous mobs they feared would be swarming through the streets.

Capital and Labor—the two great hostile camps had drawn up their armies to face each other. In a few days the war would begin in earnest. Trucks and wagons rumbled hurriedly along the streets. Hand-drawn carts jolted from store to private dwelling, carrying full loads of food stuffs, and then clattered back again for another batch. Ding-dong, ding-dong sounded the febrile warning of trolley cars. Motor cars tooted and honked. Cab drivers cracked their whips, goading their skinny hacks. The police looked watchful and stern and suspicious. Pedestrians scurried past each other with an absorbed look on their faces. The newspaper front-pages were black-lettered and exciting.

THE SOCIAL WAR THE CATASTROPHE CANNOT BE AVERTED

“Peter, what do you think will happen?” Hanna anxiously asked that night.

Peter had been eating his supper in silence. "It'll be a hard fight," he said quietly.

Hanna sighed. Even the children felt that something portentous was drawing near and went around solemn-faced and wondering, catching snatches of elder folks' conversation but understanding hardly anything of what was said.

Presently the door bell rang. It was the next-door neighbor, Fru Dahl, wanting to know the time, as her clock had stopped.

Hanna had just made coffee and so she bade Fru Dahl sit down and have a cup with them.

"Isn't it terrible the way things are going?" said Fru Dahl. She was a smooth-faced and pleasant young housewife, married only a year.

"Yah—" Hanna sadly shook her head. "It isn't right that such things should be allowed to happen."

Now Fru Dahl turned her attention to a large bouquet of flowers temporarily put into a pail of water on the sink ledge. "Gladioli! How pretty!" she exclaimed.

"Yah—hm," said Peter. "I brought them from the koloni. They come early this year."

"Oh, they are beautiful!" Fru Dahl went on. "I just love flowers."

"In a few weeks there will be plenty of them," said Peter. "And zinnias and dahlias and cannas. One gets a lot of flowers in August."

"Yah. Oh, I said to Anders the other day that we should have a koloni, too. Look at all the flowers Hammar is bringing home, I said . . ."

"Yah, and rhubarb and potatoes and carrots," Hanna put in. Fru Dahl nodded. "But of course, my husband is more for

tinkering with machinery and things like that. But I do like flowers."

"Hm," said Peter. "Hanna—give Fru Dahl another cup of coffee."

"Thanks. Oh, it's nice having a little chat like this. It makes one forget one's troubles. People are only talking about the strike and the lockout and all those dreadful things." She glanced shyly at Peter and Hanna. "Would you mind if I ran in and called Anders? It would cheer him up. We'll just stay a few minutes. . . ."

No, surely not; neither Peter nor Hanna had any objection to that, and so Fru Dahl got to her feet and hurried out to call her husband. She was back in a minute and had Anders with her. He was, perhaps, twenty-six, dark and curly-haired, an eager and ambitious young man who had a job as a mechanic's helper at Kockum's shipyard where he worked very hard, hoping he some day would be able to rise in the world.

"Good evening," said Anders, smiling. "I told Greta, 'you have some nerve, intruding on people this way.'"

"No, no, sit down," said Hanna. "I won't be going to the post-office for another half hour at least." She had heated some more coffee and now they all had a cup.

"You read about Bleriot?" Anders asked Peter.

"Yah, yah, it's wonderful!"

"I don't see how he did it," young Fru Dahl mused. "Flying all across the English Channel! I wonder if it really is true?"

"Hm, of course," said Peter. "One can never trust the papers. But I do believe he did it."

Ay, it was marvelous!

But now Fru Dahl called her husband's attention to the flowers from Peter's koloni. "Aren't they lovely?" she said.

"They sure are," Anders replied with conviction.

"Next year we, too, will have a koloni—yah?" Fru Dahl coaxed her Anders.

"I'm afraid I don't know how to go about those things, planting and all that," said Anders modestly.

"Peter will show you," Hanna interjected. "Won't you, Peter?"

Peter, he hemmed and he cleared his throat. Ay, certainly, he would teach Anders what little he knew about gardening.

"So there—now you haven't any excuse for not getting us one," Fru Dahl teased.

"You baby!" He put his arm round her waist, drawing her up close to him. "You want everything you lay your eyes on." He laughed. "So, now you people are going to make a gardener out of me. I bet the flowers won't like it much."

Ay, and they all had a real nice time. But now Hanna must go to the post-office, and so Anders and Fru Dahl rose. Peter went to the sink ledge and divided the gladioli into two equal parts. "Here, Fru Dahl," he said and handed her the bouquet. "Take these with you. I'll be getting a lot of flowers in the koloni this coming month."

52

THIS morning of August fourth marks the first day of the nation-wide General Strike. Capital and Labor have clashed in bitter warfare. The watchful police force is ordered to quell every incipient uprising, and all over the country military forces are ready with guns and bayonets to repel, if need be, the rioting of striking workers.

As a preparation for this day the apprehensive bourgeoisie have emptied the country's munition stores and armed themselves to meet murderous mobs and looters and destroyers of private property.

On this sunny morning the sky is remarkably clear and blue. The warmth of summer is still lingering, but the air is touched with an elusive breath of approaching autumn.

Such quiet!

Is this a Sunday morning, or is it the dawn of a solemn holiday?

No screaming factory whistles are heard. Not a wisp of smoke rises from a single one of the city's many factory chimneys.

No wheels are whirring, no steam puffing. What powerful hand has suddenly arrested all machinery?

Slowly the sun rises, flooding with a golden light this strangely hushed city.

But no ringing hammer-strokes from work shop and plant greet the approaching day. No wagons or trucks come rumbling in the streets; not the rattle of a single cart breaks this unnatural stillness; not a street car is running.

Where is the feverish haste and hurry of a big city awakening to its working day?

Or—where are the looting hordes? Where are the shouting and yelling mobs?

The city is breathlessly still.

You hear only the tramp, tramp, tramp of boots on the pavements.

All these men in their Sunday clothes—why are their faces so serious? Why do they speak in such low tense voices? Where are they all going?—Tramp, tramp.

Is this a dream of an enchanted city? This stillness, this quiet, these graved-faced men?

TRAMP, tramp, tramp—to the People's Park. Strike mass meeting. Organized and unorganized alike! A steady stream of somber-faced workers, most of them men, is pouring through the gates leading into the park. Outside in the street numerous foot patrolmen and also a detachment of mounted police on tail-swishing horses are ready to charge with drawn sabers into the milling crowd.

But no disturbance takes place. There is no excitement. No loud voices. Only a deep murmur filling the air as thousands of strikers stream continuously into the leafy grounds of the park.

The well-kept park is very beautiful at this time of the year. Facing the entrance, a large artificial lake, with playing fountain and flower-clad banks, holds in its limpid water small shoals of darting gold-fish. But today no visitors stop to watch and admire. The stream of Sunday-clad men passes on to the right, past green bowers where during happier days they have been wont to picnic of a Sunday morning with

their families and friends, bringing with them from home a basket of food and a few bottles of ale and a schnaps.

Tramp, tramp.—Thousands upon thousands, the strikers are flocking into the park and massing in an enormous assemblage on the spacious grounds in front of the vaudeville stage. The morning is by now well advanced and the sunshine glitters merrily as if these multitudes were gathering for a joyous celebration. Round about the meeting-grounds a light wind plays among the leaves of shadowy trees.

Krok and carpenter Fridman arrive in company but are a little late and get a place at the very fringe of the crowd. The tall, raw-boned carpenter cranes his neck and glares impatiently toward the open-air stage in front of which a platform has been temporarily constructed. "Why th' hell don't they begin?" he brays. "They've no system, those guys, that's why they're losin' out all th' time."

The smallish Krok makes some sort of neutral grunt which can be taken as sign of agreement or whatever one likes. He cannot see what is going on over at the stage, and it's no use for him to stretch himself and stand on tiptoe because he is too short anyway. So he just grunts once more and absently strokes his scrubby moustache. He looks downcast and worried and underfed, and his clothes are shabby.

Now a hush descends upon the closely-packed crowd. Fridman's elbow jabs Krok in the side. "It's startin'," the carpenter informs him. "It's 'bout time or I'd be goin'!"

Away off, near the stage, a man is climbing on to the platform. He stands erect, his gaze sweeping over the great aggregation. Now he raises his hand. And twelve thousand people keep a breathless silence, all eagerly straining their ears in an effort to hear.

"Comrades!" he calls out. "Let us all sing: *Sons of Labor!*" The men start to sing. Faltering at first, but rapidly swelling in volume, the solemn strains roll booming upon the stillness:

All sons of Labor rally to battle;
Toilers and brothers in all lands unite!

The steady beats echo through the summer-green park. When the song is ended silence again flows back over the multitude. Over on the platform the speaker takes a step forward. He is a man of about thirty-five, of medium height, slender, with loosely-falling hair and an earnest face. Now he lifts his voice and throws his words clear and strong out over the listening men:

"Workers! Comrades! This day of August 4, 1909, will be recorded as one of the greatest moments in the history of Labor's struggle against its oppressors. The toiling masses of an entire nation have risen as one man in firm determination to resist further exploitation on the part of their capitalistic overlords. . . ."

A thousand-throated murmur rises from the audience. Here and there a voice flares up in bitter invective. The packed crowd surges forward and then the rear part again eddies back as those in front elbow for room.

The speaker continues. He reminds his hearers of the intolerable hardships the workers have endured for years. He pictures how the recurring lockouts have ravaged the ranks of labor and brought starvation, misery and distress in their wake. "But now," he cries, "the wage-earners can no longer tolerate this demoralizing treatment!"

"In launching out upon this great contest we are fully aware of the unfortunate restrictions being imposed upon our national life, but our critics shall know we have acted only in a spirit of self-protection. Let it be clear from the outset that we have not risen for political gain. Today not Socialism but Labor is making its voice heard in the land. . . ."

A tremendous roar of assent again interrupts the speech. The drawn-out clapping of hands is deafening. The speaker waits in a tense attitude. At last, with a gesture, he urges the crowd to silence and goes on. He points out how both the bourgeois and capitalist press are loudly condemning Labor for its declaration of the general strike, labeling the workers' stand "a crime against society," crying, "class war is repugnant."

"As to the first charge—when human life, liberty or rights are at stake, the aggressor threatening these inviolable principles must face the accusation of criminal proceedings. And the repugnancies of constant class war—who knows these evils better than the worker? Is it not he and his children who starve when the ruthless class war is carried on? Is it not the worker's home that is wrecked as his few belongings go to the pawnbroker or are thrown into the street by landlord or city marshal! Who could long for peace more fervently than the worker!

"But where is to be found that utopian shore where benevolent employers willingly extend to the toiling masses the rights to which they are entitled? Have not the workers in all lands always been forced to fight bitterly for every slightest improvement of their living standard? Has not every minute advance toward livable and humane conditions been fought for and paid for with sweat and blood and anguish and despair?

"I say again: We have begun this fight—not for political power, not in order to secure for ourselves luxuries or abundance. Today we are fighting for our daily bread. We want enough bread to still our hunger—and the hunger of our children!"

Thundering applause, handclapping and cheers.

"What did he say?" Krok asks of Fridman who is clapping furiously.

"He says we're goin' t'lick those goddamn bastards!" Fridman roars back to make himself heard. Then he starts pounding his hands afresh, although the general applause is now abating.

Standing there behind the human wall which closes out his view Krok is studying his broken old shoes, a vacant look in his eyes. He distractedly bites his nails. His face is very lean. Round about his melancholy eyes a criss-cross of wrinkles tells of worry and lack of nourishment.

The crowd is now again hushed, and the speaker's words are heard more clearly. He asks his hearers to remember that they have not only risen in defense of their meager wages but also for the recognition of their right to organize. "But what are trade unions and organizations worth if we are denied representation when labor agreements are signed? Therefore—and this is the great principle, the very essence for which we have entered upon this struggle—we demand the right of Collective Bargaining!"

A burst of approval greets this last statement. Fridman is almost breaking his hands in his efforts to out-clap all others but finds time to throw a menacing glare back over his shoulder at a group of late-comers who are jamming in too close about him.

Finally the speaker makes an appeal to the workers for calm

and order during the strike. He cries: "The present general strike is undoubtedly the most impressive proletarian mobilization of our age. We are under the eyes of the entire civilized world." He exhorts his listeners to resort to no futile violence, nor to any forms of sabotage which would but result in the entire movement being drenched in blood. "Therefore—be calm in the face of whatever provocation you may suffer at the hands of the government, the military, or the police. Remember your great responsibility! Remember that you are fighting not for yourselves alone but that in this struggle you are also the champions of the rights of all workers throughout the world."

He has finished. His face is very pale as he stands motionless, gazing out over the applauding throngs. Presently a rousing note rises from a group of young men directly in front of the platform—an assemblage of the League of Social-Democratic Youth which takes up its battle hymn. And while the speaker descends from the platform all the thousands of strikers join in the singing:

Forth ye soldiers of toil, and forth ye armies of youth,
Under standards that fly for deliverance and truth.

....

The deep-toned beats of the song are like the tramp, tramp, tramp of vast armies marching to battle. To be sure, the majority of the voices are rough and unschooled, but the fervor back of them is genuine.

....

We go forth, forth to fight for human freedom and right,

And what's heavy for one is for many shoulders light.

....

Another speaker steps upon the platform, a sheaf of papers in his hand. He stands still, waiting while the measured peals of the song resound through the park:

....

Yea, this land, this is ours, where others reap what we have sowed:
This, our land, we have cleared and we have built, we have ploughed.

Forth to fight for our rights, if we are truly Swedish men.
They have stolen our land, we shall take it back again!

Silence.

The new speaker begins to address the meeting. First he reads aloud the proclamation issued by the Secretariat of the Labor Federation. That done he goes over the situation.—The Executive Council of the Federation is opposed to any form of sabotage. Thus there will be no interference with work concerned with the postal service, public utilities, railroads, sanitation, fire department, the care of the sick, and the care of living animals. Industry alone is to be arrested. Work will also be allowed in small shops in case they are not included in any employers' association. But the speaker exhorts those permitted to work to assist their striking comrades as much as possible. "Yah—," and he makes a short pause while looking out over the thousands of silent men and women whose serious faces are turned toward him—"I warn you not to expect any relief from the Federation, as all available means will be saved to mitigate the after-effects of the strike. I empha-

size this so that you will be fully aware of the gravity of the moment and the extent of the sacrifices expected of you. It is upon your endurance and tenaciousness and loyalty that we rely for victory in this struggle. Verily you are not strangers to suffering, and which of you does not know the wrenching at heart when your children are crying for bread? But we have to fight this battle with whatever weapons are at our hand. And you may remember, in these days of trial, that you are making your sacrifices for a worthy cause.

“Are you, then, willing to make these sacrifices? Will you stand firm in this struggle? Will you remain loyal to your comrades?”

“We will! We will! Yah, we will!” a thundering answer rolls back to the speaker who stands bent forward, one hand clenched, the other crushing his bundle of papers.

“We will! We will!”

While yet the air is being rent with ringing cheers a group of men start to sing the *Internationale*. The shouting ceases and the whole assemblage joins in the singing:

Arise, you pris'ners of starvation!
Arise, you wretched of the earth!
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world's in birth.

• • •

Fridman expands his chest and distorts his square face fearfully as he bellows out: “No more tra-di-tions shall bind us. Arise, you slaves; no more in thrall! The earth shall rise on new foun-da-tions. We have been naught, we shall be all. . . .”

We want no condescending saviors,
To rule us from a judgment hall;
We workers ask not for their favors,
Let us consult for all.

• • •

“To make the thie-ef disgorge his booty,” Krok sings sadly but still with that preoccupied look in his eyes. “To free the spirit from its cell. We must ourselves decide our duty. We must decide and do it well.”

54

EVENING found the city wrapped in the same solemn quiet as during the morning hours of that remarkable first day of the strike. The newspapers reported unbroken order throughout the country.

The following day dawned and proceeded similarly. Nowhere any disturbance. Everywhere quiet and calm.

This was Thursday. In the afternoon Hanna stood with her empty purse in her hand, racking her brain, wondering nervously how she would get a supper on the table that evening. She had always managed to make what she called her "food money" last until Friday night when Peter came home with his wages, but during these last few days money had trickled through her fingers like water. Prices were soaring; neighbors had come borrowing. They had not asked for much, to be true—just a ten-öre piece, or a twenty-five öre piece, but now Hanna had not one öre left in her purse.

As she stood there thinking, and feeling in her breast that aching pain which always accompanied worry, then suddenly

help came unexpectedly in a rag-man's guise. For presently a well-known, frail and cracked old voice rose from the yard:

Ole busted rubbers
An' junk an' bones an' ra-ags;
Yeah, all kinds o' ra-ags
. . . .

The bundle of rags in the attic! A thought shot through Hanna's mind. She snatched the key from its hook and ran upstairs and fetched the bundle. "Good God, I thank you for helping me. Help us all. Amen," she said in her heart as she hurried downstairs and into the kitchen. She had five empty bottles in the closet and took them, too, then ran down into the yard and out on the street where grey-bearded and lean-faced Johan Rag-man stood beside his rickety cart, a steelyard in his hand, weighing up the rags brought to him by anxious housewives.

Johan peered, dim-eyed, at the steelyard's scale. "Ten öre," he said to Fru Bergsson who was craning her neck, intently watching the yard.

"Only ten!" Fru Bergsson sighed, disappointed. She looked very large beside the rag-man. Her somewhat flabby face had a nervous flush. "Only ten," she repeated. "But Johan . . ."

"Ten öre," said Johan Rag-man quietly. "That's all I can give." He looked inquiringly at Fru Bergsson to see whether she wanted to sell. It was not that Johan was unfeeling. On the contrary—he had one of those sensitive souls that no amount of battering ever makes hard. And he paid the maximum price for the junk and rags that were brought to him. His dealings were fair, and everyone knew it. He had spent

his life walking among the poor, as poor as himself. He knew their anxious eyes as he weighed their bundles; he knew the tremble of hands receiving the few odd öre the stuff was worth. In a way Johan Rag-man was a savior, for to him the poor came in their great distress; from him thousands had received enough to still for a day their pangs of hunger. Johan Rag-man was the poor people's last resort this side of ruin and despair. Crossing that boundary they came face to face with the pawnbroker. Johan they looked upon as a friend and a helper. They loved him. But the pawnbroker—a helper too—him they hated as an enemy.

"Ten öre," said Johan again, almost sorrowfully, because he was well aware that Fru Bergsson had expected more—and needed badly a great deal more.

"Yah, yah," Fru Bergsson sighed and hurried away with her hand clenched around the money Johan had given her.

Now the Krok-woman pushed forward with a burlap bag full of bottles. Johan took them out of the bag. "Can't use these four," he said, handing back the rejected bottles.

"Why not? Them's good bottles . . ." the Krok-woman began excitedly.

"They're colored," said Johan.

The other housewives glared impatiently at the downcast Krok-woman. "Ye know well enough colored ones ain't no good!" someone snapped.

The Krok-woman angrily wheeled round. "Them bottles . . ." she began peevishly, but Johan interrupted her. "Wanna sell th' bag too?" he asked. His prophet-like grey beard moved softly in the wind.

The Krok-woman's face brightened a trifle. "Yah—"

"Two öre," said Johan. So in a way that made up for the

colored bottles which the Krok-woman took back with her as she went.

"These rags, Johan?" said Hanna.

Johan undid the bundle and looked at the stuff, then, having bunched the rags together again, he hooked the batch on to the end of the steelyard. He adjusted the scale and steadied it with a touch of his finger.—"Seventeen öre."

"Thanks," said Hanna. "And here are four bottles."

"Eight öre," said Johan. "Twenty-five in all."

Hanna took the money and went back into the yard, figuring how she best could spend the money. There was no question of buying meat. A loaf of bread and perhaps a little skimmed milk. . . .

As she walked upstairs she heard a child's subdued sobbing from Svensson's flat. And presently Hanna realized that she had heard this crying all day long. But so many things had been worrying her, and she had had so much to attend to that she had paid no attention. And then, she was used to the crying of Svensson's two small children. They fared none too well, she thought, what with their father bedridden and their mother letting both herself and the home go to ruin.

Hanna paused on the landing. She pressed the bell and stood waiting. But as no one came to the door she entered. She went and looked into the kitchen whence the crying came. The two little pale-faced girls sat crouching in a corner between the sink and the table. One of them was eight, the other five. Their faces were grimy and unwashed and wet with tears.

But what startled Hanna was the sight of Fru Svensson who lay sprawling on the sofa, dead drunk, her face dreadful to look at, haggard and ravaged, and her mouth wide open. She

had been drinking denatured alcohol this time. The kitchen was full of the smell of it.

With a shudder Hanna turned from the revolting sight. "There, there—Inga and Maja. . . ." She bent down and lifted the girls to their feet. "Now," she went on, "you come with me and I'll take you up and wash your faces. And then—we'll see if we can't get a bite to eat."

She stepped to Fru Svensson's side and shook her good and hard, but the woman was like one dead, and so Hanna thought it best to let her alone. "We'll go upstairs," she said to the girls and took Inga, the smallest one, up in her arms.

On the threshold she stopped and looked into the living-room where Svensson was lying in his bed.

"Svensson," Hanna called softly. "How do you feel?"

But he did not answer. He seemed to be asleep. His face was yellowish and sunken.

Hanna was just about to tiptoe away with the girls when she noticed that Svensson's eyes were wide open.

She stood still for a moment, looking at the man.—"Svensson!" she called again, her breath bated. "Svensson . . .!"

He did not answer. Hanna put Inga down on the floor and hesitatingly entered the room. She walked slowly to the bed and stood looking down upon the man. He was lying perfectly still. His eyes were glazed.

Hanna felt herself pale. She held her breath and put her hand to her breast. And presently she became aware of the strange stillness that surrounded her. No carts rattled in the street; no clanging trolleys were heard from a distance. There was hardly a sound.

Her hand remained on her breast. Her heart was pounding

hard. She held her eyes on that wasted still face of the man in the bed.

Then from a yard a few houses away came the brittle voice of Johan Rag-man as he sang his junk-song:

....

An' copper'n iron an' zinc an' tin,
An' all sorts o' bottles, both thick an' thin.
Ra-ag's an' bones!
Ra-ag's an' bones!

Hanna bent over the bed. She stretched out her hand and gently closed the eyes of the dead man.

55

ON FRIDAY night Peter had not come home from work although it was well past the time for his usual return. Hanna uneasily watched the clock. "Good God, I hope nothing has happened to father!" she said. "He should have been home long ago."

Vanda, Britta and little Nils were sitting on the wooden sofa, waiting. Nils cried silently, for he was very hungry. Neither he nor his sisters nor Hanna nor Erland had had anything to eat since this morning when Hanna had made a bread pudding out of some hard crusts she had kept soaking in water over night.

"Won't he come soon?" Nils sobbed and blew his nose.

"Yah, Nils—soon," said Hanna and again glanced at the clock. She went into the living-room and looked out of the window. She peered up and down the street, but Peter was not to be seen. "Wonder where he can be?" she said to Marta who was sitting in the dusk, rocking the baby to sleep.

Marta raised her anxious eyes to her mother but kept on rocking the cradle. She was eleven and mothered her younger

sisters and little Nils and the baby when Hanna went out working. Marta had always been rather fretful and peevish, but lately she had changed. She had grown quieter and more patient. One would say that a certain hush had come over her personality, something abiding, inward-turned, watchful.

She rocked the cradle. The wall clock's ticking sounded very loud, for the room was so quiet, and the street lay in almost absolute silence. "Tickety tock, tickety tock," the clock hurried on. The baby wailed sleepily. Marta bent over the child, soothing it with soft cooing.

Hanna pulled in her head from out of the window. She sighed and went back to the kitchen and sat down in nervous waiting on the edge of a chair. "What do you think can have happened?" she asked Erland in a low voice so that the children wouldn't hear.

He shook his head.

Hanna kept looking at him, searchingly. "You are getting thin, Erland," she said. "And you never used to be that pale. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Ya-ah . . ." he said, lingering on the word. Then, after a while—"I hate that shop, though."

"Oh, but you're not thinking of quitting, are you?" Hanna exclaimed in alarm, "It's a good trade, you know—the moulding business. And Mattsson told me you're doing really well."

Erland did not reply. He gazed silently into the shadowy forms of the tree outside the window. Between the boughs he had a glimpse of the sky which grew more and more somber, darkening by imperceptible degrees. August twilight flowed softly into the kitchen where they all sat waiting for Peter, little Nils giving an occasional broken-hearted blubber, Vanda

and Marta almost motionless in the dusk, only Britta restlessly shifting on the sofa.

Erland thought rebelliously of how stupid this was—they shoved you into any sort of factory or old shop and then expected you to be enthusiastic about it and like it and make it your life work. He felt a smoldering resentment. He almost could have sprung to his feet and yelled at his mother. He was filled with a seething discontent—this panicky feeling which at times filled him almost to the bursting point. As he sat there gazing into the dusk he felt welling up within him a black wave of misery cluttered with all kinds of oppressing thoughts and snatches of smutty talk from the shop. The kitchen felt close and airless to him. He was beset by a sudden desire to run out of the house. . . .

The evening newspaper was lying in front of him on the table, the front page full of news about the strike. Absently he let his eyes wander over the columns.

Hanna nervously wrung her hands. The time was near eight o'clock.—Where was Peter?

Little Nils blew his nose which now was red and swollen from all this handling. Vanda had taken to crying, too. But Britta stared fiercely at the wall. She jerked her legs.

Hanna bit her lip. Without knowing it she had begun rocking her body as she sat there on the edge of the chair, her hands fidgeting in her lap.

"Perhaps I should walk down Berg Street and see if father is coming," Erland suggested, but even as he was speaking both Hanna and the children lifted their heads in strained attention. They had heard a sound on the stairs.

"Here he comes!" Britta cried.

"It's father!" said Nils and pushed his yellow shock of hair

away from his eyes. He blew his nose thoroughly, then slid down from the sofa and ran to meet Peter.

Hanna hurriedly got to her feet and lit the gas lamp. The pale bluish light flickered up and filled the kitchen and drove out the dusk to stand in a sudden blackness outside the open window.

"I knew he would come," said Britta, twisting her arm behind her back and then up to the nape of her neck. "You're always so scared."

Hanna paid no attention to the girl but turned her questioning eyes on Peter who now appeared in the doorway. She could tell at a glance that something was wrong, for he looked angry and upset.

"You're late, Peter," she said.

His reply was a loud clearing of his throat, leaving no doubt as to the state of his mind.

"Where have you been?" Hanna asked cautiously.

"People's House," he growled and gave another rumble.

Hanna waited in silence. Little Nils had again resumed his place on the sofa. His tearful blue eyes seemed very wondering as he kept watching his father. He just couldn't make up his mind whether he should blubber or not.

Before Peter had taken off either hat or coat he fished up his black purse from an inside pocket. Still mute, he flapped the purse open and snatched out of it two single bills. "Hm-m-m!" He clapped the bank notes onto the table top. Just like that. Today no sitting down amiably in his shirt-sleeves, counting out the bills one by one, a whole lot of them, with Hanna and the children watching. No, nothing. He just clapped the bills onto the table and hawked savagely.

Then he looked at Hanna, challenging-like.

She was looking at the two ten-kronor bills.—Twenty kronor! 'Twas five less than Peter's ordinary wages! And of course no overtime. The strike had upset everything.

Hanna's eyes were still on the two bills. They seemed utterly small and somehow lonely and naked on that empty table where by right a good supper should have been waiting for Peter's coming home.

Ay, there was nothing on that table but the two bills! Hanna seemed to be thinking hard. "But—Peter," she said, hesitating. "That's only twenty . . . ?"

He regarded her with an almost morbid satisfaction, his old black derby pushed slightly over on the back of his neck, giving a wicked touch to his customary sober appearance.

For a moment they were thus facing each other, the wondering Hanna and Peter with unwonted spitefulness animating his tired face. Little Nils stared open-mouthed at the rare spectacle, his red nose shining in the gas-light.

"Peter—only twenty?" Hanna said again. She made her voice sound very friendly.

"Yah!" Peter growled angrily. "And be glad you get that!"

Little soft-hearted Vanda gave a muffled gasp from where she sat beside Nils on the sofa. Nils opened his eyes wide. But Britta regarded her father critically.

"Be glad you get that!" Peter repeated once more, but with less heat. He glanced furtively at Erland.

Hanna caught her lip between her teeth and silently lowered her gaze to the bills. She stood pondering deeply.

Peter watched her closely. He rather seemed to take pleasure in her melancholy countenance. Neither of them spoke. The kitchen was full of an oppressive silence. The children were breathlessly watching their father.

Peter knocked the derby full back onto his neck. "Hm.—Gave five kronor to th' strike fund," he muttered. "Went to a meeting at th' People's House.—Hm-m-m! . . ."

"Oh!" Now Hanna understood. She slowly picked up the two bills. She again stood thinking, then turned uneasily to Peter. "How in the world will we get along with that?" she said.

"Hm-m-m!" said Peter and stared stonily into the autumn darkness outside the window. "Hm-m-m!" He snatched off his derby which hung precariously at the back of his head. He growled and stalked out into the hall and doffed his coat.

Marta came into the kitchen from the dark living-room where she had at last succeeded in getting the baby to sleep. Hanna glanced at the clock. "Marta," she said, and scribbled a few items on a slip of paper, "run down to the grocery store, quick, and get this, otherwise we won't get any supper tonight. My head swims, I am that hungry."

Marta took the piece of paper and also the ten-kronor bill Hanna gave her. "Don't lose the money, whatever you do," Hanna warned her.

Then she turned to Peter. "So you have been to a meeting," she said, conciliatorily.

"Yah," he replied. He didn't sound quite so mad as a minute ago. But evidently some annoyance was still troubling him.

Presently it slipped out. "I think I'll quit working myself," he said defiantly. "Like the rest," he added. His temper seemed to be rising again. He straddled his legs and shoved his hands into his trouser pockets. He avoided looking at Hanna.

She just stared at him. "But—but, Peter . . ." she began, not considering that Peter was in no mood for advice. He was

about to bang his fist on the table but checked himself. "I hate this whole business!" he snapped. "Working when other people go on strike! What d'you think I am?" he suddenly roared. "A strikebreaker, or what?"

"But they allow you to work—the whole shop," she tried to soothe him. "Peter. And you've paid . . ."

"Paid! Yah—! To hell with what I've paid! Don't I notice th' way people are looking at me? Sneering and making remarks behind my back. I'm sick of it! I won't have it!"

"No one makes any remarks about you, Peter. You only fancy that," Hanna said softly. "This very afternoon Fru Dahl spoke so very highly about you. She said you're such a fine man."

Peter glanced up. "Did she say that?" he asked, longfacedly.

"Sure. I've heard many people say that about you. They all like you. And why shouldn't they? Fru Dahl was really glad your shop didn't have to join the strike."

An expression of great relief spread over Peter's face. He sat silent for a while, gazing thoughtfully before him; then he turned and eyed the children on the sofa. "Yah—there's no cakes tonight, children," he said apologetically.

None of them replied. Vanda and Britta accepted the news stoically, although with evident disappointment, but a twitching drew across the utterly dejected face of little Nils. His lips quivered. And again his red-rimmed eyes flooded with tears. —No food all day! No cakes on Friday night. Nothing! "Ugh-hu-hu-hu!" He broke into a forlorn crying. What was the use of controlling oneself? He blubbered and blew his sore-looking nose. He hiccupped and coughed and then he blubbered some more.

Peter regarded him helplessly. He turned to Hanna. "It

wasn't that I forgot," he said slowly. "But I thought . . . as I had only two ten-kronor bills it wouldn't be right to break them."

Hanna nodded. "Don't mind him," she said. "The poor boy is starved."

Nils heard her, and realizing that he was getting sympathy he blubbered away without check or restraint.

"Now, now," Peter tried to console the boy. "Don't cry any more, Nils. Better times will come and we'll have cake again."

"Blub-blub! Oh! Ugh-hu-hu-hu!" Nils swallowed and gulped and moaned.

"Be quiet, Nils!" Hanna warned him. "You'll wake the baby."

"Come here, Nils," said Peter kindly, and held out his hand. Nils glided off the sofa and shambled over to Peter's side.

"Now, listen, Nils," Peter began, "let us talk this over, you and I. You're a big boy now. You'll soon be a man. . . ."

Nils heroically composed his face and licked away a few salt tears that had run down onto his lips. He just shook once with a suppressed sob.

"Nils," Peter continued, holding the boy's hands, "I know how it feels to be hungry . . . Nils—I know you haven't had anything to eat today, but—you know—father hasn't had anything either. And neither has mother . . . or Erland, or your sisters."

Nils raised his head and met the gaze from Peter's kind eyes. He gave a short snuffle. He looked down at his hands.

"Nils—thousands and thousands of little boys have been hungry today . . . and many of them will go to bed hungry.

... You know, Nils—we have at least something. You're a big boy . . . Nils. . . ."

"Yah," Nils murmured, blubbering just a wee bit. He freed his left hand and brushed at his eyes. Then as Peter let go his hand he shuffled back to the sofa, trying his best not to notice Britta who regarded him coldly.

Peter spoke to Erland. "Twould be well if the strike were over," he said. "It brings a lot of suffering to innocent people."

"Yah," Erland replied. "Yah, yah. . . ." Peter's remark seemed to have pulled him out of some deep thoughts. He brushed a wisp of hair from his forehead. His hands were stained brown and red with shellac which had bitten into the skin and was difficult to remove.

Now Marta returned from the grocery store. She entered the kitchen and put the bag of groceries on the table. She gave Hanna the change. Hanna counted the money. She looked questioningly at Peter. "Should we let them have a penny-cake each?" she asked with a nod at the children on the sofa.

Nils gave a faint blubber.

"Yah, yah," said Peter, brightening. "Yah, I think so."

"I want one with chocolate seeds," Nils snuffled with a sob of relief.

"You go down to the bakery, Erland," said Hanna. "Get one each for the children.—Penny-cakes."

"With chocolate seeds," Nils reminded him. He gave a last blubber of release and then wiped his eyes in a manner indicating that peace had at last found its way to his stormy heart.

"Don't forget," Hanna called after Erland. "Chocolate seeds!"

56

WHEN they all had eaten their fill Hanna put the children to bed. Little Nils was allowed to bring his penny-cake with him as he crept under the blanket.

"I wanna say somethin' to father," Nils said to Hanna and sat up in bed.

"What is it, Nils?"

"I wanna ask him somethin'."

"Father is reading the paper. Tell it to me."

Nils nibbled at the cake. "No, I wanna tell it to him."

Hanna wearily raised her eyebrows. "Peter!" she called out toward the kitchen. "Peter! come here a minute, will you?"

Peter came into the room, carrying the evening paper with him. "What is it?"

"Nils has something to tell you." She turned to the boy. "Now get it over with and then go to sleep," she said. "I have to go to the post-office. It's late."

Nils looked up at Peter. "Can I go with you to the King's Park on Sunday?" he asked.

"Hm—yah, I guess so, Nils."

“ ‘Cause I wanna look at the ducks,” said Nils, treating himself to a couple of chocolate seeds. “In the pond,” he added. “Those Spanish . . .”

“Japanese, you mean,” Peter corrected him. “Yah, we’ll go Sunday morning.”

“No, you can’t go Sunday,” Hanna put in. “It’s Svensson’s funeral, don’t you know?”

Nils made a face. But then a cheerful idea brightened him. “Can I come to the funeral, too?” he asked Hanna.

“I should say not. The very idea! But I tell you this, that if you start crying again now that you’ve had a good supper and all, then I’m going to spank you!”

Nils sullenly scraped a few chocolate seeds off his penny-cake.

“We’ll go the Sunday after the funeral, Nils,” Peter consoled him. “And perhaps we’ll go to the museum, too.”

“For sure?” Nils asked appealingly.

“Yah, yah.”

“ ‘Cause I wanna look at those Spanish ducks,” said Nils, and lay back on the pillows, his hand closed hard around his cake. He drew a deep sigh which seemed to relieve him of the very last of that day’s sorrow. He sniffed contentedly and closed his eyes. Ay, after all, the day had ended far better than it had begun!

“What time is the funeral going to be?” Peter asked Hanna as they went back to the kitchen.

“We start from here around nine in the morning,” she said. “I’ve been airing your black bridegroom suit. It looks as good as it did fourteen years ago.”

“Hm,” said Peter gloomily. “I wish I didn’t have to go to that funeral.”

"Oh, but you must! You know it's only going to be you and me and Fru Svensson and Svensson's brother. Only one cab."

Peter sat brooding over this nuisance about the funeral. "It'll spoil my whole Sunday," he muttered. "And I've no white tie," he said hopefully. "And my top hat is broken. I can't go."

But Hanna shattered his illusions of a peaceful Sunday morning spent with little Nils at the pond with the Japanese ducks. "I've borrowed a tie for you," she said. "And I've washed and ironed a shirt front and a couple of good collars. No one will notice your top hat being a little broken."

Peter stared hard at the paper, pretending he was reading.

"Yah," said Hanna. "I've a job on my hands watching so she keeps sober for the funeral. Poor woman, she's all alone down there. They've taken the children away from her."

"Where to?"

"Some kind of home. I don't know."

"Hm.—What'll happen to her now?"

"The poorhouse, I guess," said Hanna sadly.

Peter let the paper sink to his knees. After a while he asked, "What did she say when they took the children?"

"Say!" Hanna repeated. "We had to hold her, poor soul. She was screaming. I guess she loved her little ones as much as I love mine."

Peter nodded. "Yah, yah."

"Only she wasn't strong enough to stand up and take the blows. 'Twas the drink that ruined her."

Peter sat silently thinking. A balmy wind wafted in through the open window. The evening was very quiet.

"Yah," Hanna continued as she cleared the table. "We all

have our weak points. Who is perfect? God made us and he gave more to some than to others."

"Yah. . . ."

Hanna wrung the dish rag in the sink and came back to the table and wiped the oil-cloth. "Life is a struggle," she said with a sigh, "But Svensson, he is out of it now. I gave a hand laying him out. As I stood looking at him I couldn't help thinking to myself that he seemed to be resting really well."

57

ON SUNDAY morning at half past eight Peter walked reluctantly down the stairs for participation in Svensson's funeral. The night before the barber had given him a satisfactory hair cut, and this morning he had himself trimmed the hairs in his ears and nostrils. Through a double shave and the grave ceremony of the Seven Cleansing Waters he had emerged very excellently groomed. And Hanna was right; his bridegroom suit looked exactly as it did when he wore it the first time. But he hated his top hat, for it was cracked in several places since the time he had sat on it by accident.

Halfway down the stairs Peter halted and stuck his forefinger between his neck and the stiff white collar. He stretched and gyrated his neck. He swore softly to himself.—That confounded collar! 'Twas too tight. Collars were always tight!

He looked wistfully out of the staircase window at the blue sky and the inviting sunshine. 'Twould have been a fine day for a stroll in the park.

He adjusted his top hat and pulled down his waistcoat. He also touched his Kaiser Wilhelm moustache, which looked

spruce and martial after having been confined in the moustache trainer all morning. The trainer was quite an elaborate affair, a sort of wire cloth bandage held in position below the nose by means of rubber strings tied at the back of the neck.

Peter sighed and continued his descent toward the landing below. Hanna had been up early this morning, helping Fru Svensson get coffee ready, and putting things in order. She met Peter at the door. She looked him up and down appraisingly. "You look fine," she said. "Really fine. I. . . ."

"The collar's too tight," he muttered and raised his chin so that she might see the red mark the collar had made.

"Couldn't you unbutton it," she suggested. "One side at least. The tie would hold it in place."

Peter followed her advice. He rotated his neck. 'Twas a great relief. "Does it show?" he asked, again lifting his chin.

"Not a bit." She bent forward and whispered some hurried information. "The matron from the orphanage is here with the children. She's going to ride with us in the cab. Svensson's brother is here, too. He'll walk."

Peter nodded, sourly.

"Now come," Hanna whispered. She wore a black skirt and a white blouse. And she had dressed her hair very nicely.

They stepped into the living-room where the most conspicuous objects were the coffin and a table covered with a white cloth and set with cups and a cake.

Peter felt very depressed as he entered, for the room looked terribly dreary, with almost no furniture, the walls bare and the wallpaper torn and soiled. Hanna had carried down four chairs of their own so that the funeral guests would have something to sit on. The tablecloth belonged to her, too, for that matter.

Peter removed his top hat and made a bow to Fru Svensson who was sitting on a chair at the far corner of the room, a numb look on her haggard face, her eyes red and swollen from much crying.

Hanna turned to the matron and touched Peter by the arm. "This is my husband," she said. And then to Peter: "Meet Fru Fogelquist."

Peter bowed, clearing his throat. "Good day, Fru Fogelquist," he said.

"Good day," said the matron. She was a rosy-faced, genial person of fifty, well-fed and easy-going.

Svensson's two little girls were sitting very solemnly on two chairs, each with a piece of cake in her hand.

"And this is Herr Svensson," Hanna introduced the brother of the dead man.

"Good day," said the brother and shook hands with Peter. The brother was a short, stocky and broad-shouldered man, with a pair of big rough hands and a windburnt face which indicated that his work kept him outdoors. His ill-fitting black suit was obviously borrowed.

"Come," Hanna said in a low voice to Peter and took him over to the coffin which was still uncovered. In the plain pine box lay the motionless form of Svensson, his body wrapped in a white shroud, a handkerchief covering his face, and his shrunken workman's hands folded about two wilting flowers on his breast. Hanna reverently removed the handkerchief.

Peter involuntarily shrank back as his eyes fell on the wasted face of the dead man whose cheek bones stuck out sharply below the sunken eye sockets. But then he bent his head, for was he not in the presence of Death.

All of a sudden Peter felt very ashamed of himself—his

worrying about small things like a tight collar or a few cracks in a top hat. Strange thoughts came to him as he stood there before the coffin.—From a dark unknown we emerge into this world; to an unknown we again depart. Life is a short interval of light—of work, joy, and also many sorrows. Who knows whence we came? We do not know where we go. All we know is this, that we are here now. . . . Peter felt a strong desire to take Hanna's hand and press it. She, too, was here now, for a brief space. And the children. They would all be together for a few short years. Therefore, it was best to try to make life bright and beautiful while it lasted, to say the kind words while they might yet be spoken. . . .

Hanna spread the handkerchief over the dead man's face. She and Peter drew back. From a corner of the dingy room came the sound of half-suppressed sobbing. Peter turned round and saw that it was Fru Svensson crying, a handkerchief crushed to her eyes. She had on a cheap black dress which cruelly emphasized the ravages of her face and the roughness of her knuckled hands.

The elder of the two little girls began to cry also, softly, the tears running down her cheeks and dropping onto the cake she held in her hand. The matron bent over her and tried to soothe her.

"Yah," said the brother of the dead man, "I might as well screw on the lid, then." He looked serious but not particularly crushed, for he had seen his brother dying by slow degrees. He shambled up to the coffin and started to put on the lid. Fru Svensson gave a sharp cry. Hanna put her arm around her. She was weeping, too. "Wait!" she said to the brother, and gently led Fru Svensson across the floor to the coffin. "She wants to look at him for the last time," she whispered.

Again she removed the handkerchief from the dead man's face. Fru Svensson clung to her, sobbing hysterically. They remained thus for a moment, then Hanna led the woman away, and the dead man's brother put the lid on the coffin.

"There, there . . ." Hanna did her best to console Fru Svensson. She made her sit down on a chair. "There—" She patted her hand. The matron, too, came and tried to comfort her.

While the brother was screwing on the lid Hanna went to the table and poured coffee into the cups. They all sat down around the table and, on Hanna's prompting, each of them took a piece of cake.

Peter felt he had to make some conversation with Svensson's brother and so he began to talk about the strike. "Hm. Seems the typographers will be joining the others on Monday."

The brother took a sip of the hot coffee before he replied. "Yah," he said, putting down his cup. "But I think that's foolish. What good will it do? I bet the Right'll get their papers out just th' same.—You know what I mean."

Peter nodded. "Hm.—It's hard times now for people," he said and looked at the matron.

"Yah—" She put on a long face and slowly stirred her coffee. "It's hard on people," she said.

The brother reached for another piece of cake and dipped it in his cup. "Th' way I figure," he said, "this ain't such a good time for a strike, all th' unions being short o' cash now after all these lockouts. They can't help the workers any an' I think that's bum."

"Yah," said Peter. "I suppose you're right."

"Why—sure!" said the brother, helping himself to some more cake. "Lissen! Didn't th' paper say they're goin' t'save

th' money till after th' strike's over? Now, th' way I figure, that ain't right."

"No, hm, I guess not," said Peter, his face flushing slightly.

Hanna glanced at him. She had been at the window, looking down into the street. "The hearse is here," she said. "I think it's best you men carry down the coffin now. We'll have to be going."

They all rose. Fru Svensson dabbed her eyes. Peter and Svensson's brother put on their top hats.

"I'll ask Dahl and one more to come and help with the coffin," said Hanna. "I'll be back in a minute."

She returned almost immediately, followed by Dahl and carpenter Fridman.

"Good day," said Dahl quietly and bowed to Fru Svensson and the matron. He nodded at Peter.

"Good day, good day," said Fridman, nodding to right and left. He stalked across the floor and lifted one end of the coffin. "It ain't heavy," he announced. "We'll get it down, don't worry."

Now the four men adjust the white shawl straps on their shoulders. They take hold of the long black box and carry it toward the door, Peter and Dahl at one end, carpenter Fridman and the dead man's brother at the other.

"Easy now! Easy!" warns Fridman as they pass through the door and out into the narrow hall.

Fru Svensson breaks into another fit of crying. She stares dimly after the coffin.

Hanna wipes her eyes. Bending toward the matron she whispers, "She knows she hasn't many days left in this flat now."

The matron nods solemnly. She is holding the two little girls by the hand. Inga is weeping silently.

“Easy there! Easy!” The black coffin rides through the hall door and out on the landing. On the stairs above a group of curious housewives are eagerly watching the proceedings.

Now begins the descent of the narrow stairs. “Take it easy!” The long box careens badly to one side, one end dipping.

Peter puffs and blows but does his best not to show that this is hard work for him. As he wrestles with his corner of the coffin the top hat glides forward over his eyes, but he feels the stairs with his feet and manages to carry on.

There’s a thumping and a scraping and a tramp of boots on the cement steps as the four men are luggering the coffin down the steps. The pallbearers struggle hard to keep the box from bumping into the walls. Peter’s face is flushed from exertion.

“You’ve got pretty steep stairs here,” the brother remarks, giving a jerk and getting a better hold on his corner of the box.

“This ain’t nothin’,” said Fridman. “You should have seen some o’ th’ houses I’ve been in!”

The women and the two children follow in the rear, Fru Svensson leaning on Hanna’s arm, her body wrenched by an occasional sob.

“Easy there! Easy!” They have reached the lower landing. Only four more steps and they are out in the yard.

The landlord comes out of his flat to see that they are not scratching the walls with the coffin corners. He watches them sourly. “Be careful!” he warns them as they pass through the door.

Peter quickly frees one hand and gives his top hat a shove back, away from his eyes. Now the worst is over and they

march with a solemn step out through the gates to the waiting hearse.

The morning air is heavy with a funeral smell of fir, for both the sidewalk and the near side of the street are strewn with chopped fir twigs as is customary when someone is dead. A group of tenants have gathered outside the gates to watch the funeral start.—There's the Krok-woman, of course, screwing up her unwashed face; there's the lanky Fru Lind, the one that got Erland his job in the grocery store; and there's fat, easy-going Fru Bendel whose husband is a waiter in a big hotel and will be seen week-days as well as Sundays coming with flying swallow-tails, wing-collar and white bow-tie like a real gentleman.

Hanna emerges through the gates, carrying a gorgeous bouquet of autumn flowers which Peter last night brought home from his koloni. She is leading the benumbed Fru Svensson by the arm. The latter walks badly, in a stumbling fashion, for her feet hurt her in the ill-fitting shoes she has borrowed for the funeral. Behind Hanna and Fru Svensson come the matron and the two girls whose faces look wan and pale in the bright morning light. Each of the children carries a small bouquet. The matron has a wreath on her arm.

The pallbearers lift one end of the coffin onto the hearse. By their united efforts they shove the box into place. There's a scraping sound and a dull hollow thud.

Hanna helps Fru Svensson into the cab while the matron places her wreath on the coffin. Then Hanna follows the matron and the two girls into the cab. The crowd on the sidewalk presses close around the vehicle to get one more view of the bereaved Fru Svensson. The Krok-woman pushes her wrinkled old hawk-like face up near the open cab door and

peers in near-sightedly. She withdraws again, with her black shawl flapping, and stands in the crowd, blinking and working her toothless jaws.

"Peter," says Hanna, putting her head out of the cab door. "There's no room for you in here. I think you'll have to walk, too."

"Yah," says Peter, and he doesn't sound disappointed. "Then I'll walk with Svensson's brother. . . ."

Young Fru Dahl steps to his side from the crowd of tenants, "Excuse me, Herr Hammar," she puts in hurriedly.—"Fru Hammar, . . . " she bends her head toward the cab door. "If Herr Hammar's going to walk—I thought, perhaps, if you wish, Anders could run up and put on his blue suit and walk with Herr Hammar and Svensson's brother.—"Twould look better having more people walking after the cab."

"Yah, yah, Fru Dahl!" Hanna looks at Peter and he nods, pleased. "It's a good idea," he says relieved, for to tell the truth he doesn't feel quite at ease with Svensson's brother.

So Fru Dahl runs upstairs with her Anders to help get him dressed in a hurry. Hanna closes the cab door. She throws stealthy glances out through the window at the curious crowd. Ay, but somehow she feels a little important, sitting like this in a cab!

Presently she catches sight of little Nils who has run downstairs in his bare feet to watch the funeral. Hanna is very much annoyed. It doesn't look well, his running barefoot on a Sunday. People might think you can't even afford a pair of shoes for your children. She tries hard to catch the eye of the boy, but he is absorbedly watching the hearse horses, which are decked out with tassel-fringed nets thrown across their backs.

But now here comes Anders, and he looks very good in his dark-blue suit and with a black derby on his curly hair. He joins Peter and Svensson's brother behind the cab. The drivers get the horses started and the hearse rolls off slowly, with a creaking and crunching and clatter of horses' hoofs. After the hearse follows the cab and the three grave-faced men, Peter, Anders and Svensson's brother.

The procession proceeds up Flint Street, and in the cab Fru Svensson puts her damp handkerchief to her tear-drenched face. The two little girls strain to look out of the windows. The cab jolts on the rutty street.

The hearse and the cab and the three trudging men reach the post-office corner, and the procession turns in on Berg Street. Hanna peeps through the small celluloid window in the back of the cab. Ay, but Peter does look fine in his black bridegroom suit! And he's so well groomed; he looks much better than Svensson's brother.

People on the street throw a passing glance at the hearse and the cab and the drivers with their big white license cards stuck in their hats; these are the cards issued by the strike committee, permitting the drivers to take a hearse and one cab to the cemetery although the workers are out in a general strike.

58

CARRYING the black coffin between them the pallbearers emerge from the somber graveyard chapel. They advance slowly along the crunching gravel path where changing patterns of light move and take form as the sunshine filters through the boughs above.

Behind the coffin follows the small group of mourners, Fru Svensson leaning on Hanna's arm. Both of the women have been crying. Hanna gazes absently in front of her at the gravel path.

Ding-dong, ding-dong.—The sonorous music of bells on the Sunday quiet. Clear and strong, from the church of St. Peter, far off on the other side of the Rörsjö Canal, a solemn pealing rolls out over the old city of Malmö—old—eight hundred years since the city's first church bells tolled, calling the devout to worship, solemnizing their marriages, and at last, when their time was full, committing them to their last resting place—citizens now nameless and forgotten and whose dust for slow-moving centuries has been one with the Scanian earth.

Ding-dong, ding-dong. Other bells are knolling, mingling their voices with those of the church of St. Peter. At the cemetery the air is heavy with flower scent. The procession leaves the path and enters a grass-covered lot which has recently been claimed for a new burial place. The pallbearers halt at a freshly-dug grave. There's an acrid smell of turned-up earth.

The bells cease ringing. Slowly the coffin is lowered into the grave. Now and then the men tighten their grip around the ropes and strenuously hold back to keep the coffin on an even level. Cautiously they lower the box into the clayey pit.

The coffin reaches the bottom. Peter and Svensson's brother pull up the ropes, then they step back to leave room for the minister.

Hanna is at the side of Fru Svensson, who keeps her dazed eyes fixed on the grave, her handkerchief crumpled up in her hand. At the other side is the matron with the two little girls.

Peter comes and stands near Hanna. He removes his top hat, for now the minister is ready to perform the service.

Both Fru Svensson and Hanna give an involuntary start at the hollow thud as the first shovel of earth falls upon the coffin down there in the grave. The minister is an elderly man with a shining bald head and a friendly face. He chants his ritual sonorously:

Dust thou art . . .

He has a small shovel in his hand. He again fills it with earth. The mourners stand silent with lowered heads. There is a second thud.

. . . . and unto dust shalt thou return . . .

Fru Svensson grips Hanna by the arm. Hanna strokes her hand.—Once more a dull thud.

.... Jesus Christ our Saviour shall raise thee on the last day.
Let us pray.—Almighty, merciful, and eternal God, Who on account of sin, hast appointed unto men once to die . . .

A scream drowns the minister's words. All eyes turn toward Fru Svensson. She takes a stumbling step forward. But Hanna gently holds her back. And she yields, covering her face with her hands.

The minister's kindly voice is continuing the prayer:

.... look in tender compassion upon us; and give us grace that we all here present may seriously consider that our bodies also, when it shall please Thee to call us hence, must return unto dust . . .

Hanna's hand closes hard around Peter's. His lean face is pale. Svensson's brother is plunged in thought.

.... help us to seek those things which are eternal . . . so that on the last day we may rise unto everlasting life. . . . Amen.

Now follows a short pause during which the minister turns the leaves of his prayer book. Hanna glances at Dahl who stands with his hat in hand, looking at the ground.

The minister speaks: "Let us also hear the Word of God concerning death and the resurrection."

Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

Our Father, Who art in heaven . . .

They all bow their heads deeper. Hanna folds her hands, half audibly following the prayer:

. . . Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us . . .

The minister closes his prayer book and comes up to the mourners. He puts his hand lightly on Fru Svensson's arm. "Be not despondent," he says softly. "Turn to Him who knows the sorrows of each heart." And with a gesture toward the grave, "He is not dead; he sleepeth."

Fru Svensson lifts her grey face to the clergyman, looking into his steady eyes, then she turns her numb gaze toward the grave.

The minister takes his hand off her arm. Hanna puts into her trembling hands the large bouquet of autumn flowers from Peter's koloni. Together they walk to the edge of the grave and look down upon the coffin. Two bunches of half-wilted flowers are lying on the lid, thrown there by the girls whom the matron is now leading aside.

Hanna gets a steady hold on Fru Svensson whose knees sag under her. The woman lets the flowers fall into the grave. There they lie, on the lid. Round about the grave is silence.

59

YAH, and so the funeral was over. Back home again Hanna took off her black skirt and white blouse and put on a house dress because now she would have to get busy making the Sunday dinner. Luckily she had cooked a vegetable soup the day before and it needed only to be heated.

As Peter had asked Volmer for dinner Hanna had made a little extra preparation, a tit-bit wherewith to whet the appetite. She had spent a few öre on a pickled herring—a really nice-looking fish—which she had skinned and boned and soaked in three waters to give it that particular melting-on-the-tongue tenderness which comes from expert treatment. Now she had the herring all sliced and ready in a saucer, with vinegar poured over it and covered with a layer of chopped onions, some cloves and a few black peppers for flavoring, and on top of it all a sprinkling of sugar.

Yah, there it was. "But what's the use?" she remarked crossly to Peter. "What's the good of pickled herring when you haven't got a schnaps?"

"No, that's true," he replied gloomily.

"Of course," Hanna added hastily. "It's sinful even to think of such things when there's so much misery all around one, but. . . ." She left the sentence unfinished and strode to the sink where she expended a shocking amount of energy peeling a batch of potatoes.

But she calmed down. "Yah," she sighed. "I wonder how Fru Svensson is feeling now, poor soul. She went to stay for a few days with Svensson's brother."

"Hm," said Peter and sat down on the sofa. He stroked his chin.

"It's strange," Hanna murmured, "to think he's gone—Svensson, I mean. Now here I'm having a big pot of vegetable soup and I can't let him taste a spoonful." She interrupted her work and turned round, looking at Peter.

He nodded. "Yah—It's strange when people have gone. . . ."

"He used to like vegetable soup," Hanna continued thoughtfully. "The same as you."

"Yah.—Hm."

"He has peace now, anyway."

"Yah. . . ."

When Hanna had fixed the potatoes she put the pot on the oil-stove. Some fifteen minutes later there was a ring at the door bell.

"That's Volmer," said Peter, rising.

And so it was. "Good day, Hanna. Good day, Peter." Volmer bulked very large as he stood in the doorway, a genial smile on his full, ruddy face.

"Good day, Volmer. Be welcome. No, I can't shake hands with you. Don't you see I'm wet? I think you had better go into the living-room, and you, too, Peter. I'll be busy here for a while."

Volmer bent over the boiling pot. He sniffed. "Aha!" He winked an eye. "Smells good—eh!"

"Good—yah. Have to make the best of it. No meat these days."

Volmer twirled the long waxed ends of his droopers. "If I know you right, Hanna, you can cook a first-class dinner on an old spike."

Hanna turned her face away in order to hide a grin. "Go into the living-room as I told you," she shot at Volmer. "Your flattery will choke you some day."

"Ha-ha-ha!" Volmer chuckled amusedly and rubbed his hands. "Good day, Erland, how are you?" he boomed upon entering the living-room.

"I'm well, thanks."

"He's growing," Volmer remarked in hushed tones to Peter as if Erland had performed quite a remarkable feat by adding an extra inch to his length.

Peter nodded. "Take a seat."

Hanna came in and spread a white cloth on the table. When they had company they always ate in the living-room. She went back to the kitchen for a basket of sliced bread and a pile of plates. When she had set the table she brought in the pickled herring.

"Aha!" Volmer opened his eyes wide. He rubbed his hands and gave an expectant twirl to his drooping handlebars, then pulled his chair closer to the table. "Looks good, Hanna."

"Hope it'll taste as well," she replied modestly. "Don't know—I think I soaked the herring a bit too much. . . ."

Volmer bent forward and peered closely at the herring under its thin layer of chopped onions and spices.—"Hm." He picked up his fork. "May I—?" He sought Hanna's eyes.

"Sure. . . ."

Volmer handled his fork delicately as he pushed some of the chopped onions to one side, exposing the herring underneath. Little twitchings of his lips told that his mouth watered. Very gently he coaxed a piece of herring onto his fork. He held it above his plate and examined it closely, then carried the delicacy to his mouth, tasting, and chewing slowly, his head cocked to one side and an absorbed expression in his pale-blue eyes.

Hanna watched him intently. That fold between Volmer's eyes made her anxious. "Perhaps," she began "that . . ."

Volmer swallowed the morsel. His brow cleared. He smacked his lips. "Hanna!" he cried with such booming conviction that he dispelled utterly all her fears. "Hanna! It tastes wonderful! It's just great!" He turned abruptly to Peter. "So damn it!" he said in low reverent tones, "I shouldn't swear on a Sunday, but she's a marvel, this woman you've married!"

Hanna lowered her eyes and embarrassedly plucked at the tablecloth. "Wish we had a schnaps for you, Volmer," she murmured. "But you know how it is. . . ."

Without a word Volmer reached back to his hip pocket and pulled out a flask. He put it down with a bang on the middle of the table, then leaned back on his chair and squarely met Hanna's startled eyes.

"Hm-m-m," said Peter, peering eagerly at the flask with its clear silvery fluid.

"But, but—Volmer!" Hanna fluttered.

"It's yours," said Volmer simply. "Go get some glasses!" he commanded with a grand flourish of his hand. And Hanna scurried away to the kitchen.

"I brought three," she said on her return. "Because—a drop will do me good. One feels a little let-down after a funeral. . . ."

Volmer filled the glasses. He raised his.—"Skål, Hanna!"

"Skål!" She clinked glass with him.

"Skål, Peter!"

"Skål!" Peter clinked, threw his head back and emptied his glass. He put it down on the table and brushed up his Kaiser Wilhelm.—"Good!"

Hanna, too, drained her glass. "Ach-ch!" She made a face, broke a lump of sugar in half and put the piece into her mouth.

"Not bad—eh?" said Volmer, looking at her.

"Strengthens you," she replied. "But where did you get it? I thought all the liquor-places were closed two days before the strike began."

"Got it in advance. You see, I had an idea they would close up."

"You're a sly one. But now, let's have some of this herring. I'll get the potatoes.—Erland," she turned to the boy who was sitting at the window doing something with a lump of clay, "run down in the yard and call the children. Dinner's ready."

She went and fetched the steaming potatoes. Volmer helped himself to some herring. "Let's have another and get well started," he suggested and again filled their glasses.

"Just a half! Just a half!" Hanna protested.

But Volmer filled her glass to overflowing. "You can stand it!" he growled. "Don't be silly.—Skål!"

"Skål, Volmer!—Skål! And many thanks to you!" Hanna sat down to the table and served Volmer a nice mealy potato.

"Yah," she sighed, "what do you think about the strike, Volmer?"

Volmer thoughtfully fingered his droopers. "It's hard to say, but I don't think this is such a good time for a general strike. I mean as far as the workers are concerned."

"That's what Svensson's brother thought," Hanna put in.

"But, of course, it had to come," Volmer continued. "Things couldn't go on the way they did. But I think the government should try and settle things. What do you say, Peter?"

"Yah—hm. But the government is for the employers. I think it's best if they keep their hands off."

"That's true, that's true."

"Have another potato, Volmer," Hanna offered. "But tell me—do you think the king really knows how badly the poor people have it?"

"Ha!" Volmer gave a contemptuous snort. "The king! A lot he cares!"

Hanna seemed deeply disappointed. She sat silently brooding. At last she said. "I used to think a great deal of the king. I had expected him to stand up for his people at a time like this."

60

AFTER dinner Hanna put Marta and Vanda to washing the dishes. Volmer made himself comfortable in the sofa corner. Peter rested in the rocking chair.

"Yah—so we're going to have a check-in clock in the shop now," Volmer remarked casually, puffing on his cigar.

Peter had been half dozing. But now he opened his eyes wide. "Check-in . . . what?" he asked.

"A clock. One of those things you put a card into and punch."

"Punch!" Peter sat up straight. "Punch! What for?"

"To show what time you get in—and when you leave. Just a clock. It came yesterday right after you had left." Volmer exhaled a large cloud of smoke. He eased a button in his waistcoat. "Excuse me, Hanna," he said. "But, y'know, I'm feeling fine after that dinner."

"I'm glad to hear it," she said, folding the tablecloth.

She was about to add something more, but Peter interrupted her. His voice sounded tense. "You mean the foreman is going to put that clock in our shop?" he demanded of Volmer.

"Yah, I guess that's what he's planning to do."

Peter jumped to his feet. "So—he doesn't even trust us to come and go any more!" he said in a quivering voice. "For a lifetime. . . . No, Hanna, stay out of this! Don't interrupt me! I'm going to have my say.—For a lifetime, almost, I've worked in that place! And if I've been five minutes late of a morning once in a while I've worked half an hour extra at night to make up for it. And now here he comes and wants me to punch a clock! I won't do it!"

"Peter! Listen . . . !" Volmer rose to his feet and approached Peter, trying to calm him.

But Peter couldn't be stopped. "Don't tell me I'm against progress," he hissed. "For I'm not. I'm a pretty good weaver. . . ."

"Of course you are!" Volmer intercepted and spread out his hands. "You're the best . . ."

"I'm a pretty good weaver," Peter resumed, "even if I do have to say it myself. And here I've watched that foreman putting up his *Mechanische Webstühle* and all those things he brought from Germany, and did you ever hear me say a word? No. And why? Because those machine looms are wonderful inventions and they do the work many hundred times faster than I ever could do it by hand. And I believe in progress, do you hear that? And when he sent to Germany for that electrical spinning jenny then again I thought to myself that there's something I've been doing by hand all my life, and I've taken a pride in the silk cords I've made, but now that's over and I'll step aside. Yah! But damn it if I'm going to punch that clock!"

"Peter!" Hanna appealed to him. "What's the difference if you . . ."

"Difference!" Peter glared at her, "because it's an insult to my character, that's what it is! Because one isn't trusted any more! It's an outrage!"

"It isn't that, Peter," Volmer said, trying to conciliate him. "Y'know our foreman. He's young and ambitious. "Y'know, he's trying to make the shop up-to-date and smart. He means no harm."

"Harm!" Peter snorted. "You go ahead and punch that clock! 'Twould be just like you!—I won't!"

Hanna touched his arm. Her voice was imploring. "Peter . . ."

"I won't!" he snapped at her. "Do you hear what I say? I won't!"

Volmer stared unhappily at the floor. His waxed handle-bars drooped. "I shouldn't have said anything," he murmured sadly.

"Hm." Peter glanced askance at him. He also threw a stealthy look at Hanna. She put the tablecloth back into one of the bureau drawers, pushed the drawer closed with a bang and strode stiff-backed out of the room.

Peter put his hands behind his back and glanced uneasily about him. The atmosphere suddenly had grown uncomfortably chill. "Hm—" he shifted on his feet. . . .

Volmer gloomily stroked his droopers. He took to watching Erland, who was modeling a man's head out of a small lump of clay. For tools he used a hairpin and a penknife.

"What's that you're doing?" Volmer asked, stooping down. "Looks great, Erland." Straightening up, he exclaimed to Peter. "You've an artist in the house! Do you know that?"

"Hm," said Peter.

Erland's face brightened. He turned the small bust lovingly in his hands.

"My! He'll become a sculptor one day!" Volmer went on. "Stick to it, Erland."

They were interrupted by a sudden noise at the outside door. "Get in, you-u-u!" they heard a snarl from little Nils. "An' stick up yer hands, quick! I'm gonna get yer money!"

"Please, dear robber, don't take it all!" came a miserable whimper in reply.

Ay, Uncle Hasse was here! As Hanna stepped into the hall the sailor stood with his arms in the air, his knees shaking from make-believe fright while little Nils ransacked his victim's pockets.

"Good day, Hansson. How are you? Be welcome," said Hanna. "Ach! You're a nuisance, Nils!" she snapped at the boy. But Uncle Hasse caught her eye and gave her a wink to be silent.

It didn't take Nils long to find the purse. But today it contained no handful of pennies. Two öre, that was all.

Uncle Hasse seemed a trifle embarrassed. "It's this damn strike!" he muttered apologetically to Hanna and swayed on his creaky shoes.

Nils looked rather long-faced as he handed back the purse. He gazed in silence at the two coppers in his hand.

Ay, but truly it's an ill wind that doesn't bring some good. For ordinarily, when Nils' booty consisted of, say, fifteen or twenty öre, then Hanna would promptly force him to deposit the whole sum in that stupid savings-box. But today—with only two öre—she forgot all about it. "Step into the living-room, Hansson," she said. "Volmer is here."

Little Nils saw his chance and backed cautiously toward the

outside door. A tremble of anticipation shook him. His face was still—with the watchful stillness of one who sees opening up before him great vistas of marvelous possibilities. He noiselessly opened the door, glided out on the landing and softly shoved the door to behind him. Then he threw himself in headlong flight down the stairs and made a mad dash for Isberg's cigar store.

TICKETY-TOCK, tickety-tock—in the quiet night the ambitious alarm clock up on the kitchen shelf was busy measuring out a stream of seconds which ultimately would lead to Monday morning. But in spite of its hurry the clock had as yet gotten no further than five minutes to eleven.

Erland was lying awake in bed, his eyes on the small clay bust he had put on the table in the full flow of the August moonlight. He felt a pleasant warmth in his breast, an unwonted satisfaction as he lay thus looking at the bust on which he had worked all day. He still felt in his finger tips that agreeable touch of the yielding clay. "Twas something he had made. Ay, a man's head it was. And in his ears echoed the words of Volmer: "You've an artist in the house!"

Ay, he felt he had to get up and touch the bust. He pushed the blankets aside and rose and stepped to the table. Cautiously he picked up the clay head and carried it near the window where he could see better. He stood in his night shirt and watched the moonlight playing upon this small cool object he held in the cup of his hand. Slowly he turned the

bust round, thrilling at the white highlights on the clay, the grey tones and deep black shadows. He touched the clay with his fingers, pressing gently. He ached to mould something more; he wished he had another lump of clay; he would have stayed up all night, kneading it and shaping it.

At last he put the bust down on the table and jumped back in bed. But he couldn't be lying down on a night like this, so he sat up, leaning against the back of the sofa, the blanket wrapped snugly about him. He looked with tender eyes upon the bust. Ay, he would get more clay, so he would, and mould bigger things than that! Before his mind's eye rose a mighty monument upon which he would be building, building—all his life. It took on the shape of a pyramid such as was pictured in his old school book, but this one was made of shining marble. And still it wasn't really marble, for there was melody to it and rhythm as in poetry, haunting cadences that beat in his brain, wonderful music woven about that soaring marble monument in the flowing moonlight. . . .

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock—the clock hammered the many small seconds into a pathway that extended itself into the great unknown world, past strange cities, through distant lands. He saw faces—men and women and children. And he walked among them. He heard their voices, and again they were left behind. Tickety-tock, tickety-tock—out of the unending stream of seconds the clock fashioned soaring bridges that spanned stormy oceans. Onward under the stars, fighting his way, following a voice that prompted him—that called him now:—Rise and come! Behold my fair lands and seas! Gaze upon these turbulent cities! Hear the clamor and the clang; it's the Song of Life. Look upon these boundaries of unexplored territory; these keepers of mysterious secrets, the scorching

deserts; the snow-capped mountains no man has ever scaled; these islands I have scattered in sunlit seas, with murmuring palm trees and the tide gliding softly upon the sandy shore! —Rise and come! Let not thy hand remain idle. . . .

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock—the clock paved a road, but inevitably, in the grey dawn, it would lead to the moulding shop. Erland felt as if a strangling hand had gripped him by the throat. For every ticking second he was one step nearer the hateful shop, the smoky and smutty and dreaded shop. 'Twas a bitter road. Tickety-tock, the little alarm clock was a malevolent demon sitting there on the shelf and hammering the seconds into paths which one had to walk whether one wanted to or not.—The shop! That terrible shop!

But then the thought struck him that seven hours lay between him and the shop! Even the demoniac clock couldn't alter that. He had seven hours all to himself—four hundred and twenty minutes—ah!—thousands of seconds! A soothing warmth again filled him and he was able to breathe more freely. He tucked the blanket around him and snuggled into the sofa corner, his head back against the wood. He looked at the bust and then out of the window, up at the silvery moon shrouded in mist and starlight.—Shy maiden! So lonely! Proud majesty of the silent midnight hours. Your path is endless!

62

HUNGER stalked through Flint Street and all the other drab streets where the workers lived. A bitter social war was being waged in which the fighters were not only able-bodied men but the old and the infirm, women and toddling children. A curious war fought by the workers with their hands in their pockets as they went silently about in their threadbare and often shabby Sunday-best. Only by their grim, set faces could you suspect the great trial endured.

A strange war, indeed! And one which caught the imagination of the entire world. Telegrams of cheer and encouragement poured in from the proletariat in every nook and corner of the globe. The striking workers were universally lauded for their courage and also for the self-discipline and the restraint with which they carried on their struggle.

Every country cabled sympathetic greetings. Finland, Russia, Germany and England—they all sent words of admiration and cheer. So did the workers of Norway and Denmark and other lands.

The war continued. The Social-Democratic press in neigh-

boring countries sent their correspondents to watch and report the spectacle. Denmark sent Ip George, one of the kingdom's famous star reporters. But Ip George soon tired of the Swedish General Strike. For what happened? Nothing. What could one say about this strike? It was flat and quite dull. Not a bomb was hurled, not a train wrecked, no—as far as Ip George knew not one single eye had been blackened.

But others came to view the battle and they saw more. The *Vorwärts* in Germany sent Völcker, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* sent one of their ablest men, and Breitscheid arrived to represent the German liberal press.

Some of those that came saw much. Through the surface calm, the quiet and the apparent tranquillity they looked into the heart of this sad drama. And a Norwegian correspondent wrote to his paper: "The great thing has happened, that as yet nothing has happened."

The Swedish Labor Federation appealed to the workers in foreign lands for help in the struggle. Tholin was sent to America to plead the case of the Swedish workers and try to raise funds. Lindley hurried to England, Branting to Germany.

For Hunger, that mangy specter, stalked through the camps of the workers.

63

HUNGER stalked through Flint Street. The hollow-eyed phantom went on its round, from house to house, and none could escape the dreaded visitor.

But he was helpful, for all that, and lent a most willing hand as the bitter-faced housewives carried their junk and rag bundles down to be loaded on to Johan Rag-man's cart. "There it goes!" the phantom grinned. "Ay, but, Fru Bergsson—that copper kettle could have served you yet many a year! And, oh, aren't you getting finicky? Fancy! Who would have thought that woollen skirt was to be cast aside so soon? Weren't you only a few weeks ago of the opinion that even though it was somewhat worn and patched such a woollen skirt would be just the thing to keep you warm when winter came? Yah! Oh, well! People do change their minds. No harm in that. He-he-he! Look, Fru Bergsson! Here's Johan Rag-man giving you forty-five öre! My! You can almost feed the whole family a dinner on that. He-he!

"He-he-he! Oh, my! Don't be in such a hurry, dear friends! The way you're crowding around Johan Rag-man's cart one

would think you're afraid he might suddenly vanish in the thin air! He-he-he! Oh, no, he won't do that. And he won't die just yet, either. I admit he looks frightfully frail, the poor old fellow, but I'll tell you confidentially that he'll out-live most of you! He-he-he! Isn't that funny?

"No, no, Fru Krok! Don't overstrain yourself lifting that heavy basket full of tin and nickelware upon the cart. I'll help you.—So there. Don't say I'm not helpful in these matters. He-he!—Don't mind, don't mind! A little joke of mine. One must have a sense of humor even in times like these. He-he-he! But, my dear Fru Krok, why didn't you take this nickelware to the pawnbroker instead? You would have at least a chance in a hundred of getting the stuff back again.—Oh—he didn't want it, you say?—No, I guess not, when I think of it. He's getting particular these days.—Trade's brisk and booming. He-he-he!—Yah, here's your money, Fru Krok. Get something good for little Erik. He needs fat on him, poor chap. He-he! But wait. Wait, Fru Krok! I've something I wanted to tell you. You see, it's just this, keep an eye on your husband. Krok—isn't that the smallish lean-faced fellow with the scrubby moustache and those worried eyes? Oh, yah, yah, I thought so. Yah, hm. What I wanted to say is this, keep an eye on him; he's going around muttering dreadful things to himself. Getting a little desperate, perhaps. You know, some people can't stand as much as others. We shouldn't blame them, though. He will get over it if you only keep little Erik out of his way. It seems he can't stand hearing the boy cry for food. He-he! Fancy! A little thing like that upsetting a man! And so many Eriks in Flint Street! He-he-he!—Yah, so long, Fru Krok. See you again!"

"Oh! My! My! See who's here!—Fru Hammar! Much

obliged! He-he! How do you do, Fru Hammar? Seems I don't meet you as often as I do the other tenants around here. I've a feeling you would do almost anything to avoid my company. Shame on you! And let me tell you this, that you're ruining your hands the way you trot around, putting them into everybody's wash tub. And two kronor a day is really a paltry sum for such back-breaking work, if you don't mind my telling you!—They give you food, too, you say? He-he-he! My dear Fru Hammar! Your whole reasoning only shows how much you dislike me. And still I'm not such a bad fellow. A mangy dog I heard someone call me the other day. People call me all kinds of names. You look upon me as your arch-enemy, a fiend, a dreaded specter. It is said that I degrade you by constant anxiety, that I make you mean and servile and cringing, that I am robbing you of your birthright and dwarfing your souls by compelling you to an everlasting struggle for shelter and bread.

“I willingly agree that much of this is true. But I also insist it is a one-sided view and that much is left out of consideration.—Look at me more closely. Forget for a moment my sunken eyes, my sallow and emaciated visage. My name is *Hunger*. I am also known as *Poverty* and *Want*. I am a mighty ruler and my subjects quail before me; their numbers are legion; they are scattered throughout all the Flint Streets of the world.

“I am *Hunger*. I slay the weak and the innocent, and I drive even the strong to despair. I devastate your homes, I fill your days with soul-racking anxiety, and in the still hours of the night I hear your weeping.

“But I am also a great prober of hearts, a teacher of wisdom that can in no other way be won. I am a severe examiner who

lays bare to you secrets of your soul that would otherwise remain forever hidden. Walk with me and you shall discover yourself—your strength as well as your innermost weakness. Before me all pretense falls away as when a garment is shed. Those who have heard my voice shall not again readily give ear to loud trumpets and blaring.

“I am *Hunger*. Behold, I am a harvester. I go forth among men to gather those whose souls may be purged by my scorching fire. Few I reap, for hearts harden before me. Kindness and love and faith are the precious flowers I slay. The path I walk is blackened as when frost lays green fields desolate.”

64

HUNGER stalked through Flint Street. But by now there wasn't any more of either junk or rags to be loaded on to Johan Rag-man's cart. The attics and cellars and closets of Flint Street had undergone a thorough cleaning, you might say. Ay, they were indeed cleaned out!

'Twas the pawnbroker now that came in for his share of things—much better things than Johan Rag-man ever had got, and yet—oh, not so very good at that!

'Twas unbelievable how people would suddenly carry away objects they had treasured for years and never had meant to part with. Here one came with a set of nickelware wrapped up in old newspapers—coffee pot, sugar bowl, cream jug. Another came carrying a suit of clothes carefully folded over one arm. The garments had been well brushed and pressed and it was to be hoped the pawnbroker wouldn't notice that the pants were a little shiny in the seat—hm, now at night in the lamplight he might not notice that the pants were frayed.

At first everyone felt a bit shy about this pawnbroker business and sneaked out of the gates when nobody seemed to be

watching. But the timidity soon wore off and gave room to a certain defiance.—Look here! We are carrying away our sewing machine! Do you still fancy we have got any money secretly saved? And what do you think of this bundle of blankets? One ought at least to get a krona for them; they're washed and clean and there isn't a hole in them. One can get along without blankets well enough in a pinch—you know what I mean; you cover yourself up with old scraps of clothing and feel really snug and warm.

Yah, yah.—But on those bitter cold nights that will be coming soon?

Oh, simple enough! Just roll the mats off the floor and put them on top of you.—Land sake! Don't be so particular!

But, now, who's this? Here's Andersson's boy, Ture, with his bicycle! Ay, they make a nice pair, those two, and isn't it a smart-looking bike! Hasn't Ture himself sworn that he would never have won the second prize in the cross-country race last year had it not been for this splendid machine? So why does Ture look so downcast now? Should he look so glum when riding on that glorious red-varnished bike with its nickel mountings, its jingling bell and its lantern and those forward-pointing steering handles like the horns of a charging bull. Ay, Ture is out for a ride, but, who knows, it may be the last on his beloved machine. For did ever Olle Karlsson manage to save up enough money to get back that spy glass he pawned two years ago? And now the pawn ticket is long overdue and surely the spy glass is sold.

But Olle with your lost spy glass, and you, Ture, spinning away on your racing bike to the pawnbroker's shop—give way, both of you; stand aside with your small sorrows, for here comes one who is having his hands cut off and his heart torn

out of his breast. Salaam, O, Hjalmar Strömberg, thou of the soaring bridges and thy even more soaring dreams!—What's that heavy load you're carrying in your arms? Oh! Beg your pardon! Proceed. And certainly, you know the way. Five blocks down Suburb Street you'll find the second-hand book shop.

65

HANNA was alone in the kitchen. She kept watching the clock, and as the time neared four she grew more and more nervous. Her face looked worn; she had shadows under her eyes.

Presently she heard a noise of many feet on the stairs, a clatter of wooden shoes as when eager children are bustling upstairs. She backed up to the sink and waited, and her eyes grew strangely dark.

The outside door was pulled open and the commotion entered the hall. Now they were here, in the doorway, the children, little Nils heading the group, the boy all out of breath and turning his expectant eyes on his mother.

She was silent. The children hustled into the kitchen. Marta and Vanda put their school books on the table and Britta tumbled hers onto the sofa. They all looked at Hanna. "I'm so hungry!" cried Britta. "What have we got to eat?"

Hanna gave no reply.

"You said I'd get a sandwich when they got home from school," little Nils spoke up reproachfully.

Hanna still remained silent. She hardly seemed to hear what the children were saying.

"I've such a pain here," Vanda complained, putting her hand on her stomach. "I'm empty. I've never been so hungry in all my life."

"Mother—please!" Little Nils' voice sounded impatient and not far from tears. "Mother—I wanna sandwich, do you hear?"

But now a hush came over the children and they all looked wonderingly at their mother. She was crying! She brushed furtively at her cheek and raised her head. "Children," she said, half audibly. "You'll have to wait just a little while yet. The—the money didn't come as I expected—but . . . it will. . . ."

"When?" Nils asked tremulously.

"I don't quite know," Hanna replied. "I expect it any minute."

Nils dropped his eyes and stood thinking. Britta had taken her seat at the table, as she'd expected food, but hearing she would get nothing she frowned and again jumped to her feet. Vanda drooped her head. But Marta, with her pale grave face and solemn eyes—Marta kept a stoical composure. She only looked at her mother. They looked at each other. They were silent.

Hanna spoke. "Children," she said, "there's something I want to do in the living-room. I want to be alone for a few minutes. Don't disturb me." She went into the room and closed the door behind her, turning the key in the lock.

She sat down on a chair and folded her hands in her lap. She was alone now, alone in the neatly-kept room which was cool and quite dark, for the sun did not reach into the narrow street this late in the afternoon.

Hanna was alone, and she sat with her hands folded, waiting, trying to still her mind so that she might be able to receive a message from the Great Helper. She had told the truth to the children when saying she had expected money and that she hoped it would come any minute. For this morning she had put her troubles before the Lord. "Dear God," she had whispered, "we have no food in the house. The children went to school without a bite to eat. And I am worried about Peter; he is getting so thin. Dear God, please help us. Please send something so that I can make a supper tonight. Amen."

The prayer had relieved her from the worst of her anxiety. She had been certain that God would help her. But now? Should she believe that He had deserted them? Had she, perhaps, done something to displease Him? She racked her brain. —But if so, He should punish her alone and not the innocent children. . . .

"Dear God, please give me a sign," she prayed, rocking her body, her hands clasped in a hard grip as if she were afraid to let go of this hope to which she clung. "A sign, dear God, a sign!"

She waited. Absently she rubbed one of her fingers on her left hand where a white mark emphasized the absence of her wedding ring. The pawnbroker had gotten that. Hanna's ring was always the first thing pawned in their times of need. Back and forth between the pawnbroker's shop and Hanna's finger that ring had travelled. Ay, and it had saved them many a time! Many a meal it had given them when they were hungry. Only 'twas always so difficult to get the ring back home again. . . .

Suddenly as Hanna sat there she was jerked out of her

thoughts by a bang on the door. Britta was heard calling. "Mother! I want to tell you something!"

With a sigh Hanna went and opened the door. "What is it?" she asked. "Didn't you hear I wanted to be left alone?"

"Look out of the window, mother!" Britta put in hurriedly. "It's Krok. I saw him in the yard."

Hanna stepped to the window and looked out. She felt a stab at her heart. For down there in the street the smallish Krok shambled along, bent double under an enormous burden he carried on his back, something round and long and wrapped in burlap, and it seemed very heavy.—Oh, Hanna knew!—So—it has come to that, she thought, and her hand trembled. They are even rolling their mats off the floor now. Her sorrowful eyes followed Krok as he trudged away up the street with the big bundle on his back, his knees sagging, his broken shoes shuffling the pavement.

She pulled back her head and looked about her in the room. Her face was pale. She had asked God for a sign and he had given it to her. "Go take thy belongings and pawn them and buy bread for thy children!" It was clear enough!

"Britta," said Hanna in a low tense voice. "Go out now and leave me alone for a while. We shall all have a good supper when father gets home, I promise you that."

Having pushed the door to behind the girl Hanna let her gaze travel around the room, from object to object, from the sewing machine to the bedspread, to the mirror, the enamelled lamp on the bureau.

Tick-tock, tick-tock—the big clock on the wall was swinging its pendulum back and forth in the wooden case with the glass door. Tick-tock, tick-tock. Aware of its grave voice Hanna looked up at the time-keeper. She felt a pain in her

breast, a sharp, aching pain. But the clock prompted her again, "Take me, take me."

—Was there no other way? Couldn't she find something to carry off that would hurt her less? She lowered her eyes from the clock to what was called the "silver shelf." That shelf with its ornaments was the pride of the Hammar family. Only Erland and Marta were allowed to dust it; none of the other children would dare to come near that shelf. Ay, 'twas referred to in terms of silver, no harm in that, even though the chief boast of that shelf was only glass and some nickel-ware. In the center, right under the clock, a proud crystal vase flaunted its flashing facets. On the left the queenly vase was flanked by a chalice and on the right by a butter cup, both shining with nickel plating. The butter cup was a most ingenious device with a glass container inside to hold the butter, and to get at it you turned a handle on the side of the cup and that made the protecting dome-like cover revolve and slide under the cup—and there was the butter, right before your eyes! But, naturally, the cup was never used except at Christmas or other big holidays.

Symmetrically arranged on each end of the shelf stood a tiny egg cup, and the shelf's particular dignity was derived from those two cups, for at least they were made of silver. Each of them carried an engraved name—*Erland* on the one and *Marta* on the other, the cups having been given to the children as their first birthday presents. That was in the days when both Hanna and Peter were much younger than now and when Erland and Marta were the only children and the family went along well on what Peter earned. Also 'twas in the days before machine looms and electrical spinning jennies had found their way to Peter's shop. People thought a lot of a

clever craftsman then, and Peter was once awarded a medal and was happy. . . .

Hanna sighed. No, she felt she couldn't touch the silver shelf—at least not yet. And, for that matter, the egg cups were so small and thin, a few öre was probably all she could expect for them anyway, so they had better remain where they were.

The silver shelf did look beautiful under the big wall clock. And on either side of the clock was a very small walnut shelf, each carrying a nickel-plated candlestick with a taper. 'Twas like an altar or something, the whole thing, the way it was arranged. Everyone who came visiting looked at that part of the wall.

Hanna bit her knuckles in her distress; she didn't know what to do. But something had to be done, for the children couldn't go to bed without supper. Again Hanna's worried gaze swept the room. What could she sacrifice? What carry away? The more she hesitated the more dear each object seemed to her; they all seemed equally dear. How could she make her choice? How could she, for example, take the enamelled lamp and say to it, "We don't need you,"—that lamp which shed such a warm soft glow in the room of a winter evening! Or wouldn't a light go out of their home if she took down the bright mirror from where it hung between the two windows!—The bedspread? Almighty God, she trembled at the very thought of the pawnbroker fingering that beautiful thing!

"—Tick-tock, take me; tick-tock, take me," the clock spoke to her again. The clock was willing to go. Of course, there was always the alarm clock in the kitchen to tell the time by. The wall clock wanted to go. "—Take me, take me," it repeated somberly. And presently it struck half past four, a

trembling metallic sound that flowed out and filled the room as with gentle music and then gradually died down. Hanna rose.—If Krok had rolled the very mats off his floor to get food for his family then she had no right to hesitate about the clock. She climbed up on the sofa, raised her hand to the timekeeper and opened the little door to the case in which the pendulum swung. She put her finger to the brass disc, and with an abrupt tick the clock stopped. The pendulum hung lifeless and still. The friendly voice of the clock had ceased. The room all at once seemed invaded by a hostile silence.

Hanna stood still for a moment, gazing at the clock's dial, then slowly she closed the case door. With an effort she lifted the heavy clock from its hook. She stepped down off the sofa and put the clock on the table, with a newspaper under it, then went and fetched a rag and started to dust and polish the wood-work of the clock. She also polished the glass that covered the dial. From a bureau drawer she took out a folded sheet rather too frayed to be used on the beds any more. She wrapped the clock up carefully in the white clean sheet.

66

YAH, and now Hanna is on her way to the pawnbroker. The clock weighs very heavily in her arms, but her heart feels heavier yet.

Now, isn't it strange how a simple thing like a clock can speak to you? But speak it does. It might be because you have heard the clock ticking away for so many years, in good times and bad, that although the pendulum is no longer swinging in its measured rhythm you still seem to hear the familiar voice.

But even more, perhaps, are you aware of the clock's cool white face. How many thousands of times you have looked at that dial with the circle of numbers around it and the pointers calling your attention to duties awaiting you or joys approaching? How often hasn't Hanna glanced at that clock and remarked to the children "It's half-past six now, father will soon be home." Or she has been sitting near the warm stove, with the children around her, telling some of those marvelous Småland tales, and presently she has looked up above the silver shelf and said with a little sigh, "Yah, children, it's

eight o'clock now, I'll have to go to the post-office and do the cleaning."

.... Hanna shifted the clock in her arms. She had not expected it would be that heavy to carry. She slowed down her steps and almost came to a stop.—Should she, after all, have taken the mirror, or perhaps the lamp? And whatever would Peter say when he got home and found that the clock was missing? Good God, what was she doing, really—carrying their clock to the pawnbroker! She swallowed thickly. But now she again remembered her neighbor Krok bent double under the big bundle of mats, and she quickened her steps. . . .

The clock spoke to her as she went, and ay, in a way she couldn't have had pleasanter company. The clock remembered so many jolly things—New Year's night, for example, with the whole family gathered in the living-room, all of them sleepy-eyed, and the small children nodding, but everyone grimly determined to hear the wall clock announce with twelve sounding beats the advent of the new year. Ay, and Uncle Hasse is here too and he's watching the clock, on the sly, like, pretending he isn't very much interested. But he also keeps an eye on little Nils who is half asleep in the sofa corner, and Uncle Hasse has both his rough hands stuffed into the pockets of his double-breasted serge, for he has something there that'll make little Nils sit up and take notice.—Fire-crackers Uncle Hasse has bought, two big handfuls, and little Nils knows nothing as yet; not a thing does he know, poor innocent child. Uncle Hasse makes a loud creak of his brown shoes and Nils laboriously screws up his eyes. Uncle Hasse laughs. "No, it isn't twelve yet, young man, but just you wait and you'll have the time of your life!"

—One should never part with a clock; ay, it's like a living thing, like a dear member of one's family. When it is gone you still carry its voice in your heart, for has it not shared with you both hardship and joy in days now past? Among the things Man calls dead you have no friend like a clock, if you can only get to know it right. The uncompromising clock reminds you sternly of trials you must face; irrevocably it brings you the hour, and you steel yourself and are stronger thereafter. And so also the little bright joys that have come your way, and the abiding memories that never fade from your mind—did you not share them all with the clock, does it not still remind you of those vanished hours?

Hanna looks down at the white bundle in her arms and only with a great effort is she able to fight back her tears.—Should she have taken the mirror, or maybe the lamp, or the bed-spread? Her arms ache but there's no chance for a rest, and she has at least another ten minutes' walk. She hears a muffled sound from inside the bundle; the pendulum hits the case with a dull thud.

Hanna is figuring as she trudges on. She is making plans. She has heard about an office downtown where they might want a charwoman the first of the month. If she could get that job, Hanna thinks, it would help a lot and they would soon get the clock back home again. Ay, and somehow it would be like rising a little in the social scale, having some regular cleaning to do in a fine office—just like the post-office—and not having to go around and get all soaked and wet in people's chill and dreary wash-houses, especially during the bitter-cold winter days.

Hanna is thinking as she nears the pawnbroker's shop. She has a vision of herself, neat and spick-and-span, dusting and

keeping bright and shining a fine office on South Street. Ay, that she would like to do! She could take care of that office in the mornings and go to the post-office at nights. And then she would have the whole day to herself, taking care of her own things, her washing and ironing, mending for the children. Oh, it would be wonderful if she got that job! And it would be a more regular income too; you would know what was coming each month.

Hanna puffed; she was red in the face from lugging the clock, but she was thinking, figuring, making plans. Hanna was casting about for ways out of their difficulties. She was carrying off the clock but that didn't mean their home had started on the road to decline!—No, no! God, no! She would fight and get jobs and she would meet adversity face to face—taxes, clothes for the children, rent, coal bills and gas bills. . . .

Then presently, something occurred to her and she felt a dreadful sinking of her heart. She felt as if the very ground on which she was walking were giving way under her feet.—Had she not spoken to God this morning and told Him all, how hard everything was just now? And for the first time she could remember in her life He had failed to help her. Had He averted His face? Had He left them to shift for themselves amid all these difficulties, surrounded by all this hostility?—As well might the mountains crumble and the rivers run dry. As well might the sun go out.

“Good God,” she prayed in her heart’s great need. “Do not abandon us!”

67

A THOUGHT struck Hanna as she turned into the street where the pawnshop was located. She stopped.—Now, this was Krok's pawnbroker, she knew that, and she wouldn't want to meet Krok, that would be most embarrassing for both of them. But a few blocks farther down was another pawnshop. She decided to go there instead.

She hastened her steps, for she was dreadfully tired and afraid she might drop the clock any moment. The time-keeper had ceased speaking to her; all she heard now and then was a low thud from inside the white wrapping.

Soon the pawnshop was in sight and Hanna began figuring how much she possibly could get for the clock. It would be a great blessing if the pawnbroker gave her, say, three or four kronor, but most likely he wouldn't offer her more than two. And after all, 'twas better not to burden oneself with too great a debt, the easier it would be to redeem the pawn-ticket and get the clock back home again. . . .

As she neared the shop Hanna saw the door swing open and—! . . . She stopped dead short and almost dropped the

clock, staring blankly at the small shabbily dressed man who stepped out on the sidewalk.—God in heavens! Krok! None other! Hanna glanced nervously about her, trying to think of a way to avoid meeting her neighbor. He had not seen her yet. He stood counting some money in his hand.

Ay, there was really no way out for Hanna! She made an effort to harden herself and take the matter calmly. After all, what was there to it?—A clock, that's all. Surely she wasn't the first one to . . .

Krok put the money into one of his trouser pockets and moved on. Raising his head he caught sight of Hanna. She saw his worried eyes give a startled blink. He hesitated a second, shuffling his feet, but then he went straight on to meet her.

"Good day, good day, Krok," Hanna stammered confusedly, looking aside. The bundle in her arms all at once seemed to her enormously big, and not until now had she noticed that the sheet was so white.

"Yah—hm, so we meet," said Krok. He couldn't seem to make up his mind whether to walk on or not. A stiff smile came to his tired features. He was unshaven and scrawny, but his sad eyes seemed very friendly when he looked at Hanna.

As if from impulse he put his hand lightly on her bundle. His voice sounded deeply earnest: "Fru Hammar, let me take this. You're tired." Half against Hanna's will he took the bundle from her. "What's th' use o' pretendin'?" he went on. "I tell ye straight, I've been an' pawned our . . . hm—some stuff. You're goin' there too. We're all in th' same boat, ain't we? Fru Hammar—don't feel ashamed about it. I know how

it is. Ye hate takin' them things out o' yer house.—Don't I know! An' you've such a nice place too."

They started going and proceeded slowly toward the shop. Hanna was silent. Her hand trembled as she straightened her dress which had become disordered through her lugging the clock. She met Krok's sympathetic eyes. "Don't feel badly," he said again. "It's a shame ye should have t'do this, I know, but . . ."

They reached the shop and halted on the sidewalk outside. Krok indicated the bundle. "I'll just step in an' put it on th' counter," he said. "Then I'll be on my way."

Hanna nodded. She opened the door and followed Krok into the shop. He put the bundle on the counter then sidled toward the door. "Yah—see ye later, Fru Hammar," he mumbled, pushed the door open and stepped out into the street.

68

WHEN Hanna left the shop a few minutes later she found Krok waiting outside. He looked up timidly when he heard her coming and took an uncertain step toward her. "Fru Hammar," he stammered, "I—I want t'tell ye somethin'—ask ye somethin', I mean. . . ." A deep flush spread over his lean face. "Y'see—I got some money. . . ." He took a few coins from his pocket and held them in his open hand. "Fru Hammar, I owe ye one krona, ye remember. . . . Hm, yah—I was thinkin', p'r'aps—if ye need it badly—mebbe I could pay ye back now. . . ." His voice trailed off into a hesitating mumble. He turned his sad eyes inquiringly on Hanna.

"No, Krok! Oh, no!" Hanna let drop with seeming carelessness. "Don't bother.—I mean, not now. Some other time. . . . Really, you know, it's not as bad as that. 'Twas only that—hm—some money wasn't coming as I expected. . . ."

They moved on homeward. Krok put the money into his pocket. He kept his eyes on the ground as he went, stroking his stubbly chin. His cheek-bones burned. Hanna, too, was red in the face.

They walked in silence, wrinkling their brows as if they were trying hard to find something to say. Then Hanna made a remark. "Wish the strike would be over soon," she said.

"Yah," said Krok, "mebbe it won't last long." A hopeful light flickered across his weary face. "Mebbe things'll be pickin' up," he said.

"Perhaps they will," said Hanna.

"Ye think before Christmas, mebbe?" Krok asked.

"Maybe," said Hanna.

They again trotted on without speaking, each plunged in thought. Presently Krok halted; he seemed a little embarrassed as he turned to Hanna. "Fru Hammar—mebbe we should walk different ways home. Mebbe 'twould be better if people didn't see us comin' together—y'know."

Hanna nodded. "I think so too."

"Yah, I'll be goin' round this way then. I'll take Berg Street an' across th' Möllevång Square, an' ye just walk straight on along Suburb Street."

"Yah," said Hanna, "I'll do that."

"So long, then, Fru Hammar." He raised his slouch hat. "An' thank ye for lettin' me have that krona a while yet. It's kind o' ye."

"Don't mention it, don't mention it. There's really no hurry.—Good-bye, Krok."

So now she walked on alone. Evening was drawing near. Hanna hurried her steps almost to a run. Two kronor the pawnbroker had given her; she held the money tightly squeezed in her hand. She was planning what to get for supper; was figuring how to make the money last for two days.

She reached the post-office corner and had gotten halfway down Flint Street when she spied Krok far off, coming from

the opposite direction. Hanna stopped and turned round, pretending to be looking for something. She wanted to give Krok a chance to enter the yard first. She waited a while, watching from out of the corner of her eye till she saw the smallish fellow hurry in through the gates.

Then she went on again. Presently someone touched her arm, someone coming up from behind her. Looking back Hanna saw it was Elsa, Krok's sixteen-year-old daughter. The girl was trembling from fright. "Fru Hammar!" she panted, "I don't know what's happened to father! He went out and said he would be back in half an hour but . . ."

"I just saw him stepping in through the gates," said Hanna. "Calm yourself, Elsa."

The girl drew a sigh of relief. "Oh! But, you know, sometimes we're afraid he'll go and do himself harm. He's so worried. Things are so hard!"

"I know, I know," Hanna murmured sadly.

HANNA was busy at the oil-stove when she heard Peter's footsteps on the stairs. As he entered the kitchen she turned to greet him, but at the sight of his face she gave a cry of dismay. "Peter! Peter! What's happened?" She put the pot on the stove. "What is it, Peter?"

He did not answer. His face was ashen; the muscles twitched and pulled. His eyes had a haunted expression.

He threw his hat onto the sofa and went and slumped down on his chair near the table. He seemed hardly aware of Hanna's presence but sat staring at the floor, looking utterly beaten.

Hanna stepped up to him. "Peter! In God's name, what is it? Are you sick? Tell me! Shall I run for a doctor?"

He shook his head. He looked up. The muscles of his face stood out knotty and hard. His husky voice was unrecognizable when he spoke. "They called me a scab!"

Hanna paled. She could not find a word to say. Peter averted his eyes. There was a dead silence.

The frightened children had drawn back to the door, where

they stood gazing with big eyes at their father; they had heard what he told Hanna. Little Nils did not understand the meaning of it all, but the awed faces of the others told him something very serious had happened.

"Peter—who did it?" Hanna asked at last in tense tones.

It took some time before he answered. His voice shook. "I don't know them. They were waiting for us outside the shop—a big crowd."

A hard glint flashed through Hanna's eyes. "Don't they know," she snapped, "that you're allowed to work—the whole shop is?"

Peter did not reply. He was all tense and rigid.

"And why didn't you tell them," Hanna went on, "that you're paying your share to the strike fund? I went and pawned the wall clock this afternoon," she added defiantly.

Peter raised his head. Hanna squarely met his eyes. "Yah, I got two kronor, and I'm sure I've been lending out more'n that to people around here since the strike began.—And now they should be calling you names, too!" Her eyes smoldered. "Spite!" she snorted. "God, if people weren't so jealous of each other!"

Her expression softened and she bent down and put her hand on Peter's arm. "Peter," she said tenderly, "try and forget it. You know you're not that—what they said. You couldn't be." She straightened up, listening toward the stairs. "Erland is coming," she said. "Let's eat now, Peter, you must be hungry."

Erland was heard entering the hall. Now he stood in the doorway. "Good evening," he said. He took off his cap, looking questioningly at his father. Hanna quickly gave an expla-

nation. "Father is not feeling well." She turned to the children. "Wash your hands and come and have supper.—You, Nils, see that you wash yourself clean, and don't rub the dirt off on the towel."

70

AFTER supper Hanna sent the children into the living-room so that she and Marta could wash the dishes. Peter remained on his chair, brooding. He had hardly touched any food during the meal.

Erland followed his sisters and little Nils into the room. He stopped on the threshold and stared at the empty space above the silver shelf. "Where's the clock?" he asked Vanda. "Mother took it to the pawnbroker."

He looked at his sister as if he could not believe she was telling the truth, then he again riveted his eyes on the spot above the shelf where the unfaded wallpaper would have told even a stranger that an object was missing.

He threw a quick glance around the room. Then once more he took to staring at that spot where the clock had hung when he had left home that morning; it looked like a big ugly scar on the wall between the three shelves, the silver shelf and the two smaller shelves with the candlesticks.

Hanna came into the room. She too looked up at the wall. "I had to do it, Erland," she said apologetically. "There was

no other way—I only hope we don't have to part with any more of our things. . . .”

The boy wheeled round and stared at her. “More—?”

“Erland!—What can I do? I am slaving from morning till night, working my hands to the bones. Only God knows how long one will last this way!”

Peter joined them, his face still drawn and worried. He looked silently at the bare spot on the wall. All three of them were looking.

Presently Erland left the room. He went out to the kitchen and took a key from the rack beside the oven, then hurried out on the stairs.

“Where are you going?” Hanna called after him.

“I want to get something from the attic,” he mumbled, closing the door.

He rushed upstairs to the top landing and entered the loft where each tenant had a store-room allotted to him. Standing before the rough board door he fumbled with the padlock, for it was quite dark up here. Having opened the door, he stepped into the dusty attic, taking care to pull the door to after him. He stood for a moment looking into the deep gloom that was relieved only by a slanting beam of grey light from the narrow slit in the roof which sloped steeply down to the floor. The attic was crowded with dusty old trunks, suitcases and other things. In a corner lay a bundle of clothes. At the right, on the roughly boarded wall, hung a red-and-blue striped knapsack, the very one which Peter had slung on his back when he set out for his journeyman's travels in foreign lands long before Erland was born.

Erland left the door and went and stood in a corner and shut his eyes so as to close out every distracting vision, for

now he wanted to be alone with God. He had something to tell Him.

A heavy stillness hovered above the many murky store-rooms. Erland waited for God's face to appear before him. But it would not come, perhaps because Erland's mind was capricious and roved about among irrelevant things. He squeezed his eyes closer shut and tried with all his might to see God's face so that he could speak to Him. At last it appeared. God looked like Moses, of whom there was a picture in the *Family Journal*. He had angry eyes and a tumbling beard, and two little horns were sticking out of his head.

Erland trembled before the Lord. "Dear God," he prayed in his heart, "please give me back my poetry. At least let me write one poem and help me sell it so that we can get the clock out of the pawnshop."

God made no answer. He only looked very wroth, and then His face began to fade out and disappear, but Erland held Him with a desperate effort. "Please, dear God," he begged. "Just one, please!"

God spoke. "You want many things!" His voice thundered. "And you want to quit the shop!"

"It's so dark and smoky in there," Erland quailed. "And the people are so terrible."

God scorned him. "What about all the other thousands of boys working in shops and factories? Are you any better than they?"

"No, but . . ."

"And have not some of the other tenants in the house pawned nearly all their belongings, and here you complain merely because of having lost the clock!"

"We miss it so!"

God did not answer. Instead He again accused Erland. "Lots of people don't like you," He said. "None of the boys do. There is something wrong with you!"

Erland bowed his head and his heart became still heavier, for God spoke the truth; the boys in the street hated him, he knew that; they were always after him and called him names and wanted to beat him up. It made him sick to think of it. If he only knew what was wrong with him maybe he could change. 'Twas this not knowing what people hated you for that was so dreadful. He had come to feel there was something mysteriously bad about him, something that made all people shun him. The idea haunted him; it made him feel so bitterly lonely and cut off from people.

An oppressive silence followed. God's face once more threatened to retreat but Erland appealed to Him fervently. "Forgive me, please!—And just let me write one poem!—Just one—please!"

"I want a sacrifice," God replied sternly.

"I will do anything you ask for . . . anything. . . ."

"Cut off the little finger on your left hand!"

Erland shuddered.—"No, not that, please!"

"Promise something else then," said God. "Promise you will go to church every Sunday for three months instead of going hiking with your father."

"Yah—I will."

"Write one, then."

"Thank you, dear God! I thank You. I thank You . . . !" But God withdrew His face, and when Erland opened his eyes the attic was almost dark. Only a faint light drizzled down from the narrow window in the slanting roof.

Dust covered everything, but Erland sat down on the bundle

of clothes while he waited for a poem to come. He wanted to write something different this time, something that would sell and bring money.

He waited.—Wonder—what should it be? He cast about in his mind for a suitable subject.—What would people most of all want to read about? He tried to remember some poems he had read in the Sunday supplement to the *Arbetet*, but all he could think of was that stupid poem where they said the moon was a yellow cat in a tree. And that poem didn't even have rhymes, he recalled that. How could people care for such stuff? Anyone could write poems without rhymes; to get rhymes was the very hardest thing in a poem.

He waited, but no poem came. And he didn't at all feel as he used to when about to make poems, for on those occasions he always had a feeling as if something were filling him up inside, something he couldn't hold back, something—something he never could find good words for. But now he felt instead as if lead had been poured into his breast. He tried hard to force himself to think of an opening line for a good salable poem but it wouldn't work. His thoughts slipped to the lost wall clock, and oppression welled back on him again. How he hated the thought of a stranger handling their clock, touching it, gluing tickets on to it, perhaps.—If only he could write one good poem and sell it! He might get five kronor for it.—Perhaps ten, who knows! He set his teeth and made a great effort to think of something, but of no avail; his mind remained dull and blank.

Then a chill suspicion crept upon him, and the thought soon ripened to certainty.—His poetry had left him! He had lost the ability to write because of not having practiced for so

long. That was it! He was no longer able to write. The gift had gone. 'Twas gone forever.

An undescribable despair tore his breast. Hot tears flooded his eyes. He threw himself forward across the bundle of dusty clothes and lay sobbing in the dark. When once he had given way to his feelings there was so much misery to cry out. He felt numb and tired, very tired. And he felt afraid for—he hardly knew what, some tormenting fear, something menacing that stood towering above him, invisible in the dark.

His head felt heavy and dazed. He felt he could cry a million years. . . .

HE AWOKE after having slept—he did not know for how long. The attic was now pitch dark. Through the window-slit in the roof he glimpsed a rectangular patch of sky, the dark blue gleaming faintly golden as if strewn with star dust.

He sat up on the bundle and looked before him in the dark. He felt much calmer now; a load seemed to have been taken off his chest.

Leaning his head back against the wall he sat slumped within himself, relaxing after the turmoil before his sleep. Not a sound was heard in the storerooms. The stillness soothed him. As he turned his head and looked up through the window a bright star came within his range of vision. Startled by its brightness he rose and stepped to the window. There was no other star in the sky but this beautiful bright one. But a short way off, and a little lower in the heavens hung the silvery, crescent moon, its horns turned toward the radiant star.

Tonight the moon was a youth, stretching out his arms to that beautiful maiden, the luminous star. They were alone in

the dark sky, these two, the youth calling the girl and wanting her to follow, but she, for all her loveliness, very bashful and shy.

The night was without sound, the stillness calming and healing. Erland turned from the window and stooped, groping for the bundle of clothes on the floor. He found it and sat down again and closed his eyes, rejoicing in this peace that entered him. When he looked up the next time a ray of moonlight had found its way through the window and was making a small white pool on the floor. Erland sat still, watching. The moon glided slowly onward and down toward the jagged black line of housetops silhouetted against the dark velvet sky. And the star followed after, hesitant and yet eager to hasten into the embrace of those outstretched arms.—Ah! 'twas not hard to understand what that sly moon was after—trying to get the star behind the house tops, of course, so he could have her all by himself. . . .

Erland took a deep breath. He sighed with relief. The leaden weight had now entirely disappeared from his breast. And more and more was peace flowing into him. He felt free and strong. Something fell from him and something else expanded him.—Oh! he knew! He could not be deceived! Didn't he know this wonderful feeling of being filled to overflowing . . . this feeling of might, of shaking off all bonds . . . this power. . . .

He could not remain still any longer but sprang to his feet and stood in the dark with his face turned toward the moonlight and letting it pour over his face. Ah! they were gliding away, those two, the love-sick moon and the star! The moon was already dipping down behind the housetops, only the upper horn visible, bent like a finger beckoning the star.

Erland had a sudden need to laugh out loud in his happiness but felt a run of fright down his spine at the ghostly sound of his voice that went echoing through the dark row of storerooms.

A heady wine was being poured into him. His heart pounded; his pulses were beating fast. Melody and rhythm floated into his brain; words and sentences were woven into the pattern. The music sang in his mind.

There swept a Tide
At the sunset hour,
Alas! too full up on land

• • •

It had come back to him! Life's gates were once more flung open! Fog and mist were rent apart and the bright star shone. Oh, you! He shook his fist at the gleaming horn-point just about to glide out of sight below the black line of roofs. "Oh, you!" he cried. "You'll have your way!"

—It had come back to him! Immeasurable gratefulness flooded him, a thankfulness and an ecstatic bliss too immense for words. He threw himself down on his knees. "I thank You, God, from the bottom of my heart! I will make sacrifices!—Oh, God, I give promises! I promise I will—oh, when I grow up I will write—something . . . great, something You will like. . . . I thank Thee, oh, God."

72

WHILE drinking their coffee in the morning Peter and Hanna talked together in low voices. Peter did not seem to have slept much during the night; he looked grey-faced and shaken and stared darkly at the table as he was listening to Hanna.

"You'll do it for the children's sake," she pleaded. "Peter, if you quit, what'll happen to us? And what good will it do anybody?"

Without answer he pushed his empty cup away from him and rose. He stood in silent thought for a second, then stepped out into the hall and took his hat from the peg. He cleared his throat. "Hm. Yah, Hanna," he said in a controlled voice. "Good morning, then." He went to the door.

Hanna followed him. "Peter—don't feel so badly," she said, trying not to show her deep concern. "The strike won't last forever. Everything will be right again, you'll see."

"Yah, yah . . ." he nodded absently, opened the door and stepped out on the landing.—"Good morning."

"Good morning, Peter.—Take care of yourself. . . ." She

stood looking anxiously after him as he descended the stairs, then when he was out of sight she returned into the flat and looked out of the living-room window. As Peter came out through the gates she called to him and waved her hand. He looked up and nodded.

Hanna kept looking after him until he had reached the post-office corner and turned into Berg Street, then she went back to the kitchen to her household duties.

She had sent the children away to school and started to wash some clothes by the sink when suddenly she heard a woman scream down in the yard. Bending out of the window she saw bricklayer Malm's wife with both hands pressed to her head and uttering wild shrieks. Her shabby dress was disheveled and her grey-streaked hair a tangled mass down her back.

As the woman stood there screaming her husband came after her from the ground floor where they lived. Malm was a big, husky man and ordinarily quite likable, Hanna thought, but just now he was beside himself with rage. He kept his huge fists clenched, his head thrust forward and his shoulders hunched like a mad bull. Bolting over to his shrieking wife he grabbed hold of her and clamped his hand on her mouth. "Shut up, ye goddamn fool!" he bellowed. "Shut up, or I kill ye!"

She fought and clawed and kicked to get loose, but bricklayer Malm held on to her with an iron grip, one hand squeezing her neck, his other big paw on her mouth and nose until her eyes bulged from her lack of breath. Her dress had gotten ripped at the neck and fallen down in front, showing a white empty breast.

"Now'll ye be good!" the bricklayer roared, and pushed her off from him.—"Ye goddamn bitch!"

She stumbled backwards on the cobblestones and struggled for her balance. "Ye lousy pig!" she yelled, covering her breast with her torn clothing. She pushed her rag of matted hair away from her face. "Ye lousy lazy bum, I wish t'God I hadn't never married ye!"

A murderous glint flashed in the bricklayer's eyes. He hunched his powerful shoulders. "Jesus ye!" he wheezed between his teeth and launched into her again, trembling with rage. "Goddamn ye!" He once more clapped his hand on her mouth. "Did ye hear what I said?" he snarled. "Are ye goin' t'shut up, or no, ye goddamn bitch?"

Unable to utter a sound she glared fiercely at him, her eyes burning with hate. She pounded and clawed his face. Other tenants arrived on the scene and crowded excitedly around the fighting pair, trying to part them. The Krok-woman was there, hopping about with her tattered shawl flip-flapping like the black wings of a starved-out bird, her sour eyes peering eagerly from out of her sharp unwashed face. Carpenter Fridman came running in his shirt-sleeves, his braying voice adding to the uproar. Tanner Gren and his gloomy-looking wife, Dahl and Fru Dahl came hurrying also.

The frantic Fru Malm turned to them her hectic face. "Now ye all see what he's done t'me!" she shouted shrilly. "Lookit me! He's been beatin' me black an' blue, th' yellow coward he is, hittin' a woman!"

"Yea! An' more ye'll get if ye don't shut yer stinkin' trap!" the bricklayer roared back. "Ye crazy ole hag ye are!"

"Ho-ho! That's giving it to her! That's talkin'!" the raw-

boned carpenter Fridman neighed. "Don't weaken, Martin! Don't weaken!"

But tanner Gren gave Fridman a glaring look. He got a firm hold on the bricklayer's arm. "Martin!" he begged. "Martin! Pipe down! For God's sake, calm yourself, will you?"

"Calm!" the bricklayer retorted bitterly, his gaze sweeping over the crowd of tenants. His voice shook. "Ye all know me round here, don't ye?" he appealed to them. "Ye know I ain't lazy. Jesus Christ, have a heart! What's a man goin' t'do. . . ."

"Sure, Martin," tanner Gren put in soothingly. "We know you well enough."

The bricklayer flung out his hand toward his wife whom some of the other tenants were pulling away from him. "She's been naggin' me an' naggin' me," he went on, his voice nearly breaking into a sob. "She says I'm lazy an' that I won't work.—Jesus Christ, ye know that ain't true! Look at me hands! Look at me big strong hands, I ask ye! Haven't they been workin'? Am I lazy? Ain't we all out in this strike? Jesus, I'd go down on me knees if I could start workin' t'day, this very minute! She's drivin' me crazy, this woman. She's naggin' an' naggin'. . . ."

"Martin, lissen! Lissen to me!" the tanner again tried to calm his friend. "Don't get excited now. Come along with us. We're going to the People's Park. There's a meeting. They say they've broken the strike in Stockholm and lots of other places, those damn traitors. Maybe they've ruined the whole thing for us now. Come along. Dahl is coming too, and Hjalmar."

The bricklayer grumbled but allowed himself to be dragged off, his big frame trembling. As he morosely followed Gren he cast a sidelong glance at his wife, who stood leaning against

Fru Dahl, babbling and fumbling with the shreds of her torn dress.

"Come along, Martin," Gren prompted. "Come on!"

The two men went up to where Dahl was standing a little aside. "Where's Hjalmar?" Gren asked. "Isn't he coming too?"

"Yah," said Dahl. "Let's wait a minute. He'll be right down."

"When is th' meeting?" the bricklayer asked.

"At eleven," said Gren. "Now we'll hear what they say. Jesus, doesn't it make you sick to think you've gone through all this for nothing, just so that a lot of scabs should go back on you?"

"Yah. If we had held out a few weeks more," said Dahl, "maybe everything could have been settled right."

Hjalmar Strömberg, the would-be bridge builder, stepped out into the yard from his stairway and walked toward the group. He kept his broad shoulders squared and his chest out, but somehow a light had gone from his face. He joined the three other men. "Let's go," he said. "You coming along too?" he asked the bricklayer.

Malm nodded. He threw another uneasy glance at his snuffing wife, then he followed the others. The four men shambled out of the gates.

When they had left the yard carpenter Fridman was alone with the women, the Krok-woman, Fru Dahl, tanner Gren's gloomy wife and the forlornly sobbing Fru Malm.

The Krok-woman flapped her black shawl and passed a crooked finger under her hawk-like nose to catch the drop that hung there. She sniffed and blinked her small sour eyes. "He hit ye, did he?" she croaked, pushing her shriveled visage close to the grimy face of Fru Malm. "He hit ye, th' devil!"

But the Scriptures says, 'he that's cruel troubleth his own flesh.' It's th' word of th' Lord. . . ."

But the prophesying Krok-woman was ignored. Fru Dahl did her best to console the sobbing Fru Malm. "Now, go in and lie down for a bit," she said. "That'll do you good."

"Sure," carpenter Fridman seconded her. "Christ, ye look a sight! Some lousy bastard—beatin' a woman!"

Fru Malm abruptly ceased her blubbering and turned fiercely on the carpenter, her red-rimmed eyes glistening with spite. "Ye get outta here, ye square-faced skunk!" she sputtered. "Whaddaye mean, callin' me husban' names! We had a lil' argument, that's all. Who th' hell's been askin' you to butt in! Get th' hell outta here, I say! Ye ain't good enough t'lick Martin's shoes, s'help me God! Ye go back where ye belong an' hug yer filthy money, ye can't fool me, ye stinkin' cheat; ye're havin' enough an' plenty o' what other folks ain't seein' th' tail of! Ye ain't short o' anythin'! Jesus! ye wouldn't loan me a twenty-five öre piece when I was askin' ye! Get outta here, I say! Get out afore I spit ye in th' face, ye cheatin' sneak y'are!"

Fridman backed dazedly off, muttering to himself and glaring furiously after the Krok-woman who was hopping off with this delicious piece of brand new gossip, her shoes clattering against the cobblestones as she ran, her black shawl flapping in the wind, her ragged petticoats trailing.

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HANNA was mending clothes in the afternoon when presently the door bell rang. She put her work aside and went and opened, and now!—who was there but Fru Nyman, wife of the foreman in the railroad machine shop!

Ay, such a fine visitor! “Good day, good day, Fru Nyman! What an honor!” Hanna fluttered. “Come in, please. This way, into the living-room.” But as she followed Fru Nyman in she remembered the wall clock and wished she had taken her visitor into the kitchen instead.

But much to Hanna’s surprise Fru Nyman didn’t even seem to notice the bare spot on the wall. “Fru Hammar,” she said, putting a parcel on the table. “here’s a little something for you. It might come in handy just now. Both Gustav and I have been thinking so much about you and wondering how you were making out.—Isn’t it dreadful with this strike and all? Poor people, how are they ever going to live?” She smuggled something into Hanna’s hand and patted it comfortably. “Hope this will ease things up a little for you,” she murmured.

Hanna glanced at her hand and then stared overwhelmed

at the smiling Fru Nyman. "But—but—Fru Nyman!—Five kronor!" she faltered. "This is entirely too much! I don't know when I ever can pay you back. . . ."

"Don't worry about that," Fru Nyman interrupted. "I'm having enough, thank God!"

"Thanks, Fru Nyman!" Hanna seized both hands of the little sunny-faced Fru. "Thanks, thanks! This'll help us a lot. When you have some washing to be done, please let me know, Fru Nyman, and I'll pay it off that way, if you don't mind."

"Yah, yah. We'll see. There's no hurry. But now I must have a look at the baby. You know, I haven't seen it yet." She stepped to the cradle and bent over the sleeping child. "My, what a nice big boy!" she exclaimed softly. "What's his name now again?"

"Åke," said Hanna. She was standing beside the table and undoing the package Fru Nyman had brought. She gave a cry of surprise. "Anchovy! Cheese!—Oh, that will taste good to Peter when he gets home tonight! Thanks, thanks, Fru Nyman! I shall never forget this kindness. So good of you! Now won't you sit down, please, while I make some coffee? It won't take long."

"Yah, thanks, I will. You have it so nice here." Fru Nyman's gaze flitted around the room, and Hanna was much relieved that she asked nothing about the missing wall clock.

So now Hanna hurried out into the kitchen and put on the coffee pot. She carried in a tray with two cups. "How long do you think the strike will last, Fru Nyman?" she asked as she spread a white cloth on the table.

Fru Nyman sadly shook her head. "Gustav thinks it'll last a long time yet," she replied. "It's dreadful. I see they have evicted a family in the next house here. Don't people's belong-

ings look poor and miserable when they lie like that on the street? It's a shame people should be treated that way!"

"Yah." Hanna nodded, looking about her in the room. "I don't know what I'd do if they put our things out for everyone to stare at," she said darkly. "And maybe 'twould rain on them and they'd get spoiled. You've worked so hard for what you have, you can't bear to see it go."

"No, of course not. You do get attached to things."

"Yah," Hanna went on with conviction. "And it makes you feel stronger, somehow, to have a nice little place to get back to when you've been out working all day and people have been mean and nasty to you. You feel more like a human being when you've a nice clean home."

"Yah, you're right, Fru Hammar. And you certainly keep it bright and shining here, I must say."

"Thanks, Fru Nyman, thanks." Hanna seemed greatly pleased. She folded and unfolded her hands in her lap. "I'm doing my best. . . ."

"How are things in this house?" Fru Nyman asked.—"Very bad?"

"Very very bad, Fru Nyman. Yesterday Fru Brun on the third floor fainted in the street, she was that weak from having had nothing to eat. And you should see her children! I feel like crying when only I think of them. And then there was Svensson downstairs, he died from consumption, and you should have seen their place, poor people! They had hardly a chair to sit on. Now Fru Svensson is in the poorhouse, and the children were taken to an orphan home. Yah—that's the way it goes. But no one has been thrown on the street so far. Not in this house. You know, we've such a queer landlord. He's a carpenter. When he first bought the house we all

thought he was the worst crank alive. He was always after you. He was afraid you'd ruin the house for him; you hardly dared to move around. Now when people got thrown out of work and couldn't pay their rent on time we thought for sure he'd be telling them to get out, but you should've seen him! He's letting them all stay on. When Fru Persson went and asked him to wait with the rent she owed he growled at her and said, 'Yah, if you promise to pay later. But look after your boy,' he said, 'I caught him down in the yard yesterday; he was scraping at the wall with a nail. He's ruining my house. I'll let you stay on if you promise for sure you'll pay later.'—So, you see, he isn't so bad, after all."

Fru Nyman laughed. "Yah, aren't some people funny? You know, Fru Hammar, I often think there's something good in every person, if you only can get at it."

"Yah, yah," Hanna agreed, rising from the chair. "Excuse me, Fru Nyman, I think the coffee is boiling." She went out of the room.

When she returned she carried the steaming coffee pot in her hand. She poured a little in her own cup first to get the grounds out of the spout, then she poured for Fru Nyman.

"Yah," said the latter, reaching for the sugar. "I meant to come here yesterday, but then my sister came to see me and I had to put it off."

Hanna looked up, startled.—"Yesterday . . .!"

"Yah," said Fru Nyman. "Maybe it was just as well I didn't come. Perhaps you weren't home."

"Oh, yah, I was home," Hanna replied absently. She gazed dreamily before her as she stirred her coffee. A great wonderful thought had occurred to her, but she filed it away in her mind to dwell on when she was by herself.

—When Fru Nyman had left Hanna went back into the living-room and sat down to think. She looked up at that bare spot on the wall above the silver shelf and remembered how she had asked God for help yesterday morning. Now here Fru Nyman had meant to come with five kronor, but her sister had interfered.—Was it possible, Hanna wondered, that even God himself was thwarted in His purposes sometimes? Could it be that He who had created all things—the sun, the earth, and all the million stars—that He could get mixed up in a little thing like this? That He should be thwarted in His designs by Fru Nyman's sister? Hanna was all confusion. Her head swam. Things were so strange. The mystery of the unseen so impenetrable. 'Twas better for a poor mortal, she thought, not to think too deeply into these matters. It might even be sinful, trying to peer into God's doings.

Ay, she would leave the running of the world in the hands that once had made it. She would stick by her task and meet each day in the best manner she knew. A calming peace stole over her as she sat there, thinking. A peace that came not because of the groceries Fru Nyman had given her; no, not even the five-kronor bill was responsible for this unshakable assurance that now took possession of her.—She had been given something vastly more precious—she had received a sign that God still held his hand protectingly over them as of old; that He was still their friend, their helper and guide.

SHE rose, went to the kitchen and looked in the bread-box. She had two nice fresh loaves there which she herself had baked earlier in the afternoon, for bread was almost impossible to get now during the strike even if you had the money to pay for it.

She sliced one of the loaves and made six sandwiches, using half of the anchovy and cheese Fru Nyman had brought. She took a few empty grocery bags from the closet and made up two packages, with two sandwiches in each bag. Then she went and looked out of the window. "Nils!" she called, spying the boy down in the yard where he was playing marbles with Krok's Erik. "Nils! Come up right away! I want you to run an errand for me."

Nils peered up sullenly, muttering something as he polished a marble on the sleeve of his blouse.

"Come up, do you hear?" Hanna shouted again. "If you don't obey me I'll come after you with the switch!"

Nils pouted his lips and shuffled reluctantly toward the stairway. Hanna remained by the window, looking down at

Krok's little Erik who stood leaning against the fence while waiting for his playmate to return. Hanna's heart felt heavy as she studied the boy; he was a little, thin, spindle-shanked sort of a chap with a pale face much too solemn for his six years. In his ragged castaway clothes and with his timid, back-slinking ways he reminded her of a poor shaggy stray dog. His sad eyes were surprisingly like those of his father, the smallish Krok.

Hanna turned from the window as Nils came clattering into the hall in his wooden shoes. He kicked them into a corner and entered the kitchen in his stocking-feet. "What ye want?" he sulked. "Always when I'm having some fun you want me t'run errands. . . ."

Hanna scowled. "Nils, if you say one more word I'll spank you! Now look at little Erik—do you think he answers his mother that way when she asks him to do something?"

"He does too!" said Nils with mixed sullenness and triumph. "Yesterday when she called him he ran out on th' street an'"

"Never mind what he did," Hanna interrupted. "If I ever see *you* running away when I call you y'know what you'll get."

Nils gloomily went and sat on the sofa, staring hard at the marble he still held in his chubby hand. He spat on the marble and rubbed it vigorously against his trouser leg, then critically studied the lustre. He spat again and polished the marble some more.

"Here, Nils," Hanna said. "Run with these two parcels. Take one of them to Fru Bergsson and the other to the Kroks. Hurry up, now!"

Nils gave another last-second rub to his shining marble,

then slipped it into the pocket of his blouse. He took the parcels from Hanna and proceeded lingeringly toward the door, dragging his feet.

"Nils! Nils! You're not going to a funeral!" Hanna flung after him. "Do move your legs!"

As he slowly pushed his feet into the wooden shoes he turned a cheerless face to his mother. "Was it Krok who should have 'em?" he asked with a glance at the two parcels he held pressed to his side.

"One of them!" Hanna cried. "Why don't you ever listen to what I tell you?—One of them to the Kroks and the other one to Fru Bergsson, do you hear?"

He clattered out on the landing and Hanna heard his violent descent of the stairs. He was using what he termed his one-by-two step for the purpose, which meant jumping on his right leg and skipping every second step but giving it a good tap with the left shoe in passing.

The staircase echoed with the thunder of little Nils' wooden shoes. Clenching her hands Hanna swore that when the boy got back she would give him a wallop he wouldn't soon forget. She put the remaining two sandwiches on a plate and went and pressed the bell next door. "Oh, Fru Dahl," she said as the door opened. "Here's a sandwich for you. I had a visitor this afternoon—Fru Nyman, y'know, where I used to do the washing. Yah, and she brought me a few things, so I thought we'd all have a taste of it."

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HANNA returned into the kitchen. She heard Krok's girl Elsa call her little brother. "Come up, Erik!" she shouted eagerly. "Come, quick! something good for you!"

A great warmth filled Hanna's breast. She leaned forward across the sink and looked down into the yard. There—over by the fence little solemn-faced Erik was still waiting for Nils. He stared sceptically up toward the window from which Elsa was calling him to come, but he didn't seem to believe they had anything good in store for him, so he just hung on to the fence pickets while he let his serious eyes follow the faded leaves that fluttered down around him. The afternoon was blowy and chill.

"Come, Erik! Come!" Elsa called again. And then, in a lower voice—"A sandwich!"

Erik looked up, surprised, gazing searchingly at his sister. She nodded encouragement. "Come, quick!"

At last he let go of the fence, and from her window Hanna saw him scramble across the cobblestone yard and enter the stairway. She pulled back her head with a sigh of satisfaction.

Now she heard the noise of Nils coming up the stairs as he returned from his errand. He pulled the hall door open and then again slammed it shut with such a bang that the whole house shook. His wooden shoes rumbled in the hall.

"Listen here, you!" Hanna cried. "How many times have I told you not to bang the door! Can't you ever do what I tell you?"

"I wanna sandwich," said Nils, sidling into the kitchen. He sniffed and brushed the back of his hand under his nose. Then he took to polishing his marble.

"You'll wait until father gets home," Hanna said. "He'll be here soon.—And no snuffing about it either," she added sharply as Nils began making a face. "What did Fru Bergsson say?"

"Thanks."

"Yah—and Krok?"

"He wasn't home.—Oh, gee, I can't even have a sandwich. . . ."

"Where was Krok—do you know?"

"Dunno," said Nils. He took a handful of marbles out of his sagging blouse pocket and began to roll them unenthusiastically back and forth on the sofa cover.

"Where did you get all those marbles?" Hanna asked.

"I won them," said Nils.

"Won them?"—From whom?"

"Erik." Nils rolled his marbles.

"From little Erik!—You lout!" Hanna turned angrily on him. "Haven't you any shame in you at all, taking his marbles away from the poor little fellow? You'll give them back to him, do you hear me!"

"I won them," Nils protested and backed away from his

mother who made a show of using force. 'Twas a critical moment for Nils but he was unexpectedly saved by a ring at the door bell.

"Go and see who it is," Hanna snapped, pulling herself together.

Nils willingly went to the door. Dahl was there, outside. "Good evening, Fru Hammar," he called. "Can I come in for a moment?"

"Certainly, Dahl," said Hanna. "Come right in. Only watch that Nils doesn't get out."

Ay, but her warning came too late. Nils was already out on the landing, and before Hanna had time to reach the door he was bolting downstairs, his wooden shoes making an infernal racket.

"Just you wait!" Hanna cried after him. "Just wait till father gets home and you'll see what you'll get!"

Nils didn't stop to listen. He made a breakneck flight of it until he reached the lower landing; on the remaining few steps he practiced his one-by-two.

Hanna sighed. "Come in, Dahl," she said to her neighbor. "That boy gives me grey hairs."

"You can stand a few," the pleasant-mannered Dahl replied gallantly. He followed Hanna into the kitchen and sat down on the sofa. "I just came in to thank you for the sandwiches," he said. "Greta and I had one each. They sure tasted fine."

"Oh, don't thank me," Hanna interrupted him. "I got them myself, practically." She closed the window. "My, it's getting windy," she remarked. "And it's quite cold too."

"Yah," said Dahl. "We went to a meeting in the park this forenoon. 'Twas all bunk that about lots of strikers having gone back to work. Värner Rydén gave a great speech. And

he said we shouldn't listen to any talk from the Right or believe what they said in their papers. He said that's just the employers trying to scare us and break up the strike."

"So—. He didn't say how long he thought 'twould last, did he?"

Dahl shook his head. "No. . . ." He sat listening to the wind rattling the windows. "No," he repeated after a silence. "He said 'twould have to be a fight to the finish. It's the unions they're after."

Hanna had no reply. Dusk was coming on. Dahl put his elbow on the arm-piece of the sofa, resting his chin in his cupped hand. He was thinking. Looking at him Hanna saw that a tense expression had come to his young face these last few weeks.

They could hear the wind sighing in the tree outside the window. Sooty-looking clouds drew up in the sky, and for a minute the kitchen was almost black. Then a rift was torn in the cloudy mass and a bleak light came through.

"What in God's name will we do!" Dahl said suddenly, looking up. "If this is going to last for months. . . ." He checked himself and took to staring hard out through the window.

Presently Hanna gave a start. "There's Peter," she said, raising her head and listening toward the stairs. Peter's well-known footsteps were heard. Hanna's face brightened. Ay, it made her feel good to hear him coming! She had an impulse to run and meet him at the door but refrained, fearing Dahl might think she was foolish.

Peter entered the hall. "Good evening," he said, glancing into the kitchen. "Oh, good evening, Dahl," he added on seeing his neighbor. Having hung his hat on a peg he stepped

into the kitchen. "It's windy out," he said. Hanna noticed at once that his face looked more peaceful than it had when he left in the morning. He went and sat down on his chair.

"Yah," said Dahl. "I just dropped in to thank Fru Hammar for some sandwiches she sent in, and then I was telling about the meeting in the People's Park this morning."

"Hm, yah . . ." Peter nodded.

"Fru Nyman was here this afternoon," Hanna remarked to Peter as an explanation of the sandwiches.

"Oh, was she?"

Dahl rose. "Think I'll be going in," he said. "Thanks again for what you gave us, Fru Hammar."

"Don't mention it, Dahl," Hanna said. "You know you're welcome."

"Yah—thanks. Good night, then."

"Good night, Dahl," said Peter.

"Good night," said Hanna.

Dahl went to the door. There he halted, turning round.—"By the way—how about you coming along with Greta and me to the People's Park tonight? The Strike Choir is going to sing. Quarter to nine I think it is. There'll be a band too."

Hanna looked questioningly at Peter. "Thanks, Dahl," she said, hesitating. "But I don't think we can. You know—there's the post-office."

"I see. . . . That's too bad. I think you'd have liked it. They were singing this morning at the meeting. 'Twas really nice. Yah—good night," he said again, nodding genially.

THE lamp is lit in the living-room. Hanna has undressed for the night. Standing in her white linen she bends over the cradle, watching the sleeping baby, her hand smoothing the bed-clothes caressingly. Then she straightens up and goes to the bed where the children lie. She tucks them in. That done she stands still in the lamplight, listening to the wind outside. "I think it's clearing up," she remarks to Peter who has just gone to bed.

"Yah," he replies. "It's not blowing so hard now." After a short silence he adds. "Did you close the outside door?"

"Yah, but I'd better make sure." She goes out into the hall and tries the lock, then comes back, stepping to the table where the kerosene lamp is diffusing its reddish-yellow light through the room.

"Is Erland asleep?" Peter asks.

"Yah, I think so. I don't know what's the matter with him these days. He's acting so strange. Last night he was up in the attic for nearly three hours. I thought he had gone out. When he came down he was all grimy and dusty. 'What have you

been doing?" I asked him, but he wouldn't tell me; he said he had been looking for something. I don't know what to think. And then, in the middle of the night, when I went out to get a glass of water, he had the light on and was sitting up in bed, writing something."

"Hm.—What do you think can be the matter with him?"

"He has still something left of that English sickness, I believe," Hanna replies, meditatively. "I wish the Wise Woman had been alive; she would have fixed him up." Putting her hand behind the top of the lamp's glass chimney Hanna blows out the light. The room is now pitch black, for the window curtains are drawn, and outside the night is dark with a cloudmassed sky.

Hanna gropes her way to the bed. She turns the blanket aside and with a deep sigh sinks down beside Peter. They lie silent in the dark, their breathing audible in the stillness which is broken only by a low moaning of the wind outside and the rattle and crack of the windows.

"I don't know why—I feel so restless tonight," Hanna says. "Perhaps it's the weather. . . ."

"Yah—hm . . . perhaps."

She draws another heavy sigh. The bed creaks under her as she turns about.

"Hanna—," says Peter after a little while, and by his tone she knows he has something important to tell her.

"Yah, Peter. . . ."

"Hm—I got a letter from Göteborg today."

"From Göteborg?" She repeats, questioning.

"Yah. I wrote to Wallengren a few days ago; you know Wallengren whom I used to work with in Edholm's lacemaking shop?"

"Yah, I remember you spoke about him."

"I wrote and asked him if we lacemakers couldn't get together and organize a union, but he says there aren't a dozen lacemakers left in the whole country. I wonder if that's true? He says the old craft is going; they're specializing now and doing almost everything with machinery."

"*You* wrote!" Hanna exclaims in amazement at this sudden spirit of enterprise on Peter's part.

"Yah, I did," he replies in a low steady tone. "We were talking in the shop today. Perhaps we'll join the textile industry, their union I mean."

"So—you will. . . ." Her voice indicates that she doesn't understand what difference it will make.

"Yah. One should belong to a union. At a time like this, now with the strike, one feels it's wrong not to be organized. The workers must stand together. I've been thinking a lot about it these last days."

Hanna says nothing. She is tired. Drowsiness is coming over her. But presently, in the silence, she is intuitively aware that there's something Peter wants to tell her.

She waits. After a while he speaks. "Hanna.—Are you awake?"

"Yah, Peter . . . ?"

"I want to tell you something—but don't be afraid. . . ."

"What is it?" Her voice quavers with anxiety. All at once she is wide awake.

"We might join the strike, Hanna. We have been discussing it in the shop. I thought I ought to tell you."

"Peter . . . !"

"Yah, Hanna, but try and be calm now." Out of the dark-

ness his low voice reaches her, soothing, but at the same time appealing.

"It'll be decided tomorrow," he goes on. "Hanna—we must do what's right."

Although he cannot hear her he knows she has begun to cry. He gropes about in his mind for a consoling word but cannot find anything to say.

Now Hanna speaks. "If you feel you must, Peter . . . only—I don't dare think what'll happen. . . . The parish rates are due soon and then there are the Crown taxes in December. . . ."

They lie silent. The windows are shaken by a gust of wind. Hanna is weeping softly. "Yah," Peter sighs, "Yah, yah. . . ."

After a while he says: "Hanna, I feel that whatever happens it'll be for the best. And I have a plan.—When the strike is over I'll start in as an extra letter-carrier on Sundays. That'll help us a little. Nord said I could begin any time I wanted."

"But should you, Peter? Should you, really? Then you'll have no time free for the koloni. . . ."

"Oh," he replies, making light of it. "I was figuring that Erland is old enough now to do the digging and all that."

Again a long silence. When Peter speaks the next time his voice is still grave, but also very tender. "Hanna, I've been thinking all day. Let us trust that everything will be taken care of—as long as we do what we feel is right.—Hanna—but we mustn't allow ourselves to become hard and bitter, for if we do that it seems to me we've lost everything. . . . We'll see things through—somehow. . . ."

"Yah, yah, Peter. And whatever happens we must try and save our furniture and things and keep our home nice; that

will be a memory for the children when they leave home and go out into the world."

Hanna's tears come again, but she lets them flow, for they bring relief. She has a sudden longing for the clock; she wishes it could be hanging in its old place above the silver shelf. 'Twould have comforted her to hear the steady voice; the friendly tick-tock would have dispelled this oppressive silence.

She is very tired. She lies with her limbs stretched out and her eyes closed, not even caring to brush her tears away. "Wonder where Krok went," she mumbles sleepily. "Elsa told me he ran out of the house in the afternoon and hasn't been back since. She's all upset, poor girl."

"Yah—it's a hard time for them. . . ."

Hanna draws a deep sigh. She is very very tired. Half between sleep and waking she hears the wind's moaning. . . .

. . . . The night is an immense black void in which she and Peter are lifted up . . . carried along on a swift current . . . floating . . . floating . . . away . . . floating . . .

. . . . Far beyond the regions of winds and clouds, yea, beyond the furthermost star are the realms of the Eternal Mysteries. Ay, and there, upon a diamond-studded throne, sits the Lord Himself, He, the Great Helper to whom Hanna has sent so many appeals for assistance.

There He reposes below an immense canopy of velvet-dark sky. Angels are ascending and descending; they sing beautiful harmonies, and God is listening, dreamily, His hoary head resting in His hand. High up above Him the moon is circling; it goes slowly round, round above God's head.

Messengers come and go; from all corners of the world they come; they carry prayers written on large scrolls which they

show God. He glances at the scrolls and nods His head, and He says yea to one messenger and nay to another.

But now there is confusion, and the angels falter in their singing. The moon interrupts its slow motion with a jerk; then it moves on again.

God looks up. "What was that?" He asks the archangel at his side. The angel has a great silver trumpet in his hand.

"Fru Nyman's sister," says the archangel. " 'Twas a mistake."

"Put it right again," says God.

"Yea, I will," The archangel puts the trumpet to his mouth and blows a mighty signal that sounds throughout the universe. . . .

Hanna wakes with a start, trembling and tense. A whistling wind draws by outside the windows. "Peter," she whispers. "Are you awake?"

"Yah. . . ."

"I dreamt," she murmurs. "I feel so restless. . . ."

"I dreamt, too. I'm afraid we'll hear about the death of some relative. I dreamt about white sheets."

"That's an omen," Hanna says with her breath bated. "I wonder who it'll be this time?"

"Yah, I wonder?—You know I dreamt about white sheets just before mother died—and father, too."

"Yah, I remember.—It's an omen."

They both sigh and turn about. The bed creaks.

Silence.

Hanna is drowsily thinking of her dream. What can be the meaning of it?—God and the angels and Fru Nyman's sister? . . . The blast from the silver trumpet. . . .

—Krok is standing there, surrounded by a mob. They are ill-treating him. Hanna pushes her way through the crowd.

When she gets up to Krok she sees that about his head is a crown of thorns.

"Are you Kristus?" she asks him surprised. "I thought you were Krok."

"I am the Son of Man," he answers quietly, looking at her with his sad eyes. "You know me; for all these years I have been living in Flint Street."

Now the mob drags him off. Hanna sees that he has Krok's old shoes on. "Where are they taking you?" she cries after him.

He turns round. "They are going to crucify me again."

Hanna gives a shriek. She wakes. She sits up in bed. Peter tries to calm her. "Hanna, what's the matter? Can't you sleep?"

She puts both hands on her breast, rocking her body, staring into the dark. "I'm so nervous," she says. "I dreamt again. About Krok. My whole body is trembling."

She lies back on the pillows. "I wish to God it was morning," she mumbles. "Spooks and evil ghosts must be abroad tonight."

A clock in the next flat begins to strike eleven. Hanna listens tensely to the deep bass notes floating out in the emptiness of the night. She takes to thinking of her own clock, now at the pawnbroker's. She hopes the man will keep the linen sheet well wrapped about the clock so that the wood-work won't get scratched . . . five . . . six . . . seven, she counts the beats of her neighbor's clock. Her eyelids feel leaden and heavy, very heavy. She's so tired . . . nine . . . ten. . . . Gong-ong-ong! . . . Gabriel, the archangel, blows his silver trumpet.

"That trumpet has a good sound," says God.

“Yah,” says Gabriel. “I got it from Hanna’s clock.”

“It makes the moon travel very smoothly,” God remarks, looking up at the blood-red ball circling slowly round high up beneath the black dome.

“Yah, it’s a good clock,” says Gabriel and sounds his trumpet once more.

“It’s mine!” Hanna cries. “Put the sound back in my clock again! I told the pawnbroker not to take off the wrapping!”

77

FROM the bell tower of a distant church the slow strokes of eleven rang out over the dark harbor. Krok raised his head, deliberating with himself whether to go home or not.

He listened absently to the chimes muffled by the wind that swept in from the Öresund. There was a swish and surge and gurgle around the quay piles in the water.

He shuffled his feet, trying to make up his mind what to do. His coat flapped in the wind; he pulled his old slouch hat down over his eyes, muttering to himself as he stood there nervously rubbing his stubbly chin. He cast a glance toward the city where scattered lights were gleaming, then he moved on, in the opposite direction. Before him lay the desolate harbor territory, with only a lone lamp here and there breaking the dark and throwing a glittering ribbon of light across the choppy water. A beacon flashed. Out beyond the breakwater in the black sea green and red lights blinked intermittently.

He braced himself against the wind. He kept on muttering, clenching and unclenching his hands. "I must do somethin'! —Jesus Christ, I must do somethin'! What shall I do? What

shall I do? . . . Jesus Christ! Almighty Father in heaven, what shall I do?" Desperate, he rubbed his hand back and forth across his lean face. He sighed, he groaned and he muttered. He stopped in his aimless drifting and stood restlessly tramping in one spot, torn by indecision, wanting to go home and also wanting to run away—somewhere—far . . . far away. . . .

He narrowed his eyes and peered distractedly toward the inlet, watching the breakers rolling in between the pier heads, the water grey and churning in the white flickers of the beacon light. Blasts of wind tore at his ragged clothing. He took an uncertain step. He shook his fist and swore, mumbling threats and imprecations to invisible enemies.—"Goddamn it, ye thieves an' robbers, you're keepin' it all for yerselves—we ain't got nothin'! . . . My little Erik ain't got nothin' t'eat, ye goddamn swinish robbers! . . . Jesus Christ, he was cryin'! 'I'm hungry, father,' he says, an' I ain't got nothin' t'give him. . . ." Krok was half choked by sobs rising in his throat. He brushed the back of his hand across his eyes. "Goddamn it . . . nothin' t'give him . . . th' poor little fellow . . . this goddamn strike! . . . Goddamn everythin'! . . . Those lousy robbers! . . . My little boy! Oh, Jesus Christ Almighty, what can I do?"

He went on again. Without a goal he half ran along the lonely quay. He turned from the dock and crossed the street and rambled about among the deserted dock quarters, not knowing where he went, nor caring. A frantic unrest whipped him on. Every time he stopped he immediately had to get going again. He passed under the drizzling light of a street lamp at a crossing. On rounding the corner he almost bumped against a policeman. He instinctively dodged and fell away.

The policeman glowered on him. "Whaddarye doing here?" he growled.

"Nothin'," Krok mumbled. "Nothin'," He sidled off, with an anxious glance behind him.

"Move on, then!" the policeman barked, glaring after the shabby little fellow who slunk away into the deep shadows of a dilapidated fence.

Krok hurried on. A fever mounted in his blood. The policeman's sneer rankled within him. When at a safe distance he turned round and shook his fist. "You-u!—Goddamn you! I'll—I'll . . . some day ye'll get yours, ye goddamn *byling*.* . . . Can't even let one walk on th' street! . . . Jesus Christ! . . ."

He muttered and swore to himself between his set teeth, his body swaying with excitement. He struck blind blows at the empty air.—"Oh, God Almighty! Oh, my my! Oh, my little boy, my little boy! . . ." He took a deep breath. He sighed as if mountains had been weighing on his chest. "Yah, yah, yah! . . ." He raised his gaze from the ground and looked about him and saw that he again had come near the dock. From a short way off he heard sounds as of work being carried on. Going nearer, and straining to see through the dark, he made out a small steamer lying alongside the quay and a half a dozen men unloading barrels which were rolled ashore on a gangplank.—"Scabs!" a thought shot through his mind. "Scabs!"

"Here's a chance to earn a few öre," said a voice within him.

"Scabs!" Krok wheezed, backing slowly away. But a few paces off he came to a standstill and again took to watching the men who were working by the dim light of a lantern, silently and hurriedly, now and then raising their heads and

* Cop.

looking quickly about. One man, who appeared to be the boss of the gang, was counting the barrels and making notes on a pad.

"They're getting good pay, those fellows," the voice again spoke to Krok. "You could easily have a couple of kronor in your pocket before you go home."

Krok hardly knew that he was moving back toward the ship. But he was mouthing insults to the men. "Damn shame!" he sneered. "Goddamn scabs. . . ."

"Can you blame them, though?" the voice protested. "A man has got to live. And maybe one or two of those fellows has a little Erik home, a little boy, or a girl, or maybe a whole bunch of kids that are hungry. Now, you wouldn't condemn a man just because he is giving a hand rolling a few barrels so as to get a krona to buy food? Surely it's too much asking people to starve to death!"

Krok edged nearer the ship, intently watching the work. He didn't pay any attention to the men themselves or look to see who they were; it was the work that drew him, the rolling of the barrels.

The boss of the gang turned and stared at him where he stood craning his neck. "What ye want?" he snapped.

"Nothin'," said Krok, retreating a step.

"Want t'earn a couple of kronor?" the man asked. "Come on an' give a hand."

"No! No, no! . . ." Krok backed off. "Jesus Christ, I'm not a filthy scab!" he mumbled. He turned and walked hurriedly back the way he had come. Again a tumult rose within him. He felt a searing sensation right in the middle of his breast. He felt a crazy need of yelling out loud.—"Goddamn!" He struck a fierce blow at an iron bollard he passed, cutting the

skin off his knuckles without feeling any pain. "Damn it! An' damn it, the whole goddamn business! . . ." He threw a side-long glance toward the ship where the shadowy figures hurried back and forth along the gangplank in the reddish light of the lantern.

The voice mocked him. "A couple of kronor the fellow offered you. Look here—if you don't take that money those bums over there will. So, what's the difference? You need it damn well better than they do, those sneaking traitors. They've been working all night, probably. Now, all you have to do is to go and give a hand for a few minutes—just a few minutes, that's all, so you can take a krona or two home with you and give little Erik a real treat. . . ."

Krok turned up the collar of his coat—he didn't know why; certainly it was not because of the raw wind, for this he didn't notice. He swung his arms and shifted on his feet; it got him a step toward the steamer.

"There mightn't be many barrels left—better hurry while there's time!" the voice prompted.

Krok moved on. He quickened his steps, his eyes on the gleaming lantern. The foreman heard him coming and looked up. "You here again?" he sneered. "For God's sake. Get outta here, will ye, or come an' give a hand. Make up yer mind!"

Krok said not a word. He walked aboard the ship. He stood among the men but avoided looking at them. He put his hands on a barrel and started to shove, rolling it toward the gangplank where another fellow took it over and steered it down the incline to the quay. Krok went and got another barrel. But suddenly he began to tremble violently. He withdrew his hands from the barrel and stared at them as if they had been smeared with dirt. The other men bustled about on deck,

some tipping the barrels over on their sides, others rolling them off. "Hey, you!" one of the fellows grunted, as he came pushing a barrel in front of him. "Step on it! What ye doin'?" He peered into Krok's face. Their eyes met. "Oh, hello, Krok!" the man exclaimed. "You here! How're ye makin' out?"

Krok shivered. He again took to staring at his hands.—Scab work they had done!—Scab work!

A tune began to hum in his mind, a tune with the strong rhythm as of men marching, the tramp, tramp, tramp of heavy feet.—Almighty God, he knew that song—that music. . . .

....
We go forth, forth to fight for human freedom and right,
And what's heavy for one is for many shoulders light.

....
That music, he knew it—this onward-marching tramp, tramp, tramp! He knew! He knew!—His comrades marching to battle. Strike meeting in the People's Park. The workers singing. . . .

....
Where with song we go forth, and where we hotly storm to fight,
For the toilers shall dawn break with justice and light.

....
Remember your great responsibility! . . . You are fighting for all workers throughout the world. . . .

—Scab work! Jesus! Trembling and with hot perspiration covering his body Krok glanced about him at the faces of the other men and saw that with one or two exceptions they were all hoodlums and bums, riff-raff of the waterside.

... Shall we, then, fail our comrades ... shame ourselves by weakly deserting our banners?

Suddenly he left the barrel and ran ashore. The boss shouted after him. "Hey, there.—Where're goin'?" But Krok didn't stop. He kept on running. In his ears thundered fragments of speeches he had heard at the many strike meetings in the Park. . . .

... Hold out, comrades! Hold out! A few weeks more and victory is ours. . . . The eyes of the entire world are upon us! . . .

He ran and felt as if millions of accusing eyes were following him.—There he is, the traitor, the scab, the yellow backslider! . . . Krok ran, and his mind was a crazy whirl. He ran away from the ship and across a railroad track toward a side street between some old houses. He wanted to get away—away. . . .

As he reached the corner a group of men suddenly stepped out of the black shadows by the wall. "Ye stinkin' scab!" one of them scowled and dealt Krok a stunning blow that struck him right behind the ear. Half-dazed he dodged the men who were running out in front of him. He dodged and ran, panic-stricken.—Erik was now his only thought. Erik! My little Erik! . . .

"Get him, the rat! Get him, the lousy scab!" the men were yelling after him.

Krok ran, his heart frozen with fear. Reaching the end of the street he found before him a large open section of railroad tracks. He ran straight into the blackness of that unlit section; a long way off a few signal lanterns were gleaming. His pursuers were following. He heard their curses and shouts. In wild panic he ran on, jumping over rails and sleepers, stumbling, unseeing, but onward in a headlong flight. . . .

Suddenly he felt himself stepping out into empty space. He threw up his hands, groping desperately for support, but plunged into nothingness. Something like a sword of fire cut across his chin. . . .

78

ON COMING back to consciousness Krok felt darts of terrific pain shooting from his right leg up through his body. His jaw was unfeeling and numb.

He was lying on his face in a cramped position. The surface on which he rested was hard and smooth and he realized dimly that he had fallen into some kind of a narrow cement pit belonging to the track construction. A clanking and laboriously snorting locomotive passed by near him, pulling after it a seemingly endless train of rumbling cars. The shriek of a distant steam whistle rent the night.

Krok lifted his head and tried to rise, but the effort caused him such pain that with a groan he again let his head sink to the floor of the pit. He knew his right leg was broken; his slightest move caused him an intolerable torment. Blood was trickling from the corners of his mouth. He wiped it away.

Then the full realization of what had happened burst upon his befuddled mind. A thought like a flash of lightning went sizzling through his brain.—He had scabbed! He saw himself standing on shipboard among the strikebreakers, doing the

traitorous work. It seemed terribly unreal to him now. He tried to tell himself that it was not true, that this was all a dreadful dream, but the torment of his body was so intense that he could not be deceived.

He shivered as in fever. Tortured, he ground his face against the floor of the pit, wishing with all his might and soul that he could have died to escape this misery. From the darkness above ground came no other sound but the whistling of the wind as it swept across the railroad tracks. Nothing was heard of the men who had pursued him. But other voices sounded in Krok's ears—the scorn of all those who would pursue him in the future.—Scab-Krok! Backslider! Yellow rat! Their raucous cries were in his ears. He knew that from this day on he would be hunted and persecuted all his life. His evil reputation would follow him wherever he went. Scab-Krok! Scab-Krok! An outcast and a pariah among his former comrades . . . those with whom he had worked and fought. . . .

... Little Erik! In unutterable despair he mumbled the boy's name. Little Erik!—And they would call him Scab-Erik—his boy . . . his little boy. . . .

Summoning all his strength he raised himself on his hands and cried out for help—a hoarse, inarticulate cry, for his fractured jaw prevented him from shaping his lips to words.

He cried again, staring up above the edge of the pit into the darkness, but no one heard his scream. Exhausted, he sank down on his face, with his arms spread out before him on the floor of the pit.

79

HANNA tossed in bed. Standing beside her in the darkness a dreaded phantom was mocking her. "Good day, good day, Fru Hammar.—Sounds kind of funny saying good day in the middle of the night doesn't it, he-he? It's nearly twelve o'clock. So, we really did get to meet at last, you and I. He-he! Face to face, I mean. I can hardly believe it! But you heard what Peter was saying about him joining the strike. Yah, and so that's that. Well, sooner or later you all come my way. But you did put up a stiff fight, I must give you credit for that. Yah, yah—all this useless fighting! Am I not so much mightier than you? And still you kick and you struggle, poor things, trying to keep away from me. It almost breaks my heart sometimes! He-he-he!—You don't think I have a heart, do you? Oh, yah, I have, but you see, it's so well protected. I've hidden it within an iron casing so it won't break when I go around among people and watch their misery; that's what it is; I've hidden my heart within an iron casing. He-he-he!

"Yah, yah! It's windy out, isn't it? The windows are rattling. And it's kind of lonesome in here without the clock.

He-he! Funny how you can miss a thing like that! Yah, but you might as well get used to those things, you know. Fru Hammar—take the advice of one who knows—get used to things, that's the great secret of getting along in life, don't you know what I mean? Take the case of getting old, for example. How could you endure age bending you and shriveling you up and plowing deep wrinkles in your face if it wasn't for the fact that you were getting slowly used to it? So I suggest that you try and reconcile yourself to the fact that the clock is gone. That would be a good start. I would even ask you to consider what next you should carry away to the pawnbroker. He-he! What about making a clean sweep of the silver shelf? —So, so, I know how you feel about it. But listen to me! I think you should go around more in other people's houses; you would see that they are much worse off than you are, and after all that's a consolation, isn't it? He-he-he!—Yah, listen to Dahl's clock striking twelve! My, my, time is flying! I must be going. Good-bye, Fru Hammar. There's a day tomorrow. I'm glad we got to know each other at last. He-he!—Good-bye. . . ."

The phantom went visiting. He stalked through Flint Street in the night, and no doors could be barred to him. He would suddenly stand by people's sides, whispering in their ears. And even strong men would pale and tremble.

Mattsson, of the moulding shop, was just finishing up for the night when the phantom entered the little crowded attic workshop. Stacks of dusty mouldings were leaning against the roughly boarded walls; the floor was littered with odds and ends of mouldings, scraps of paper and pieces of card-board left over from the frames Mattsson was making. Suspended from the ceiling hung a kerosene lamp which threw a

shaded light on the work bench and on Mattsson as he stood bent over a framed picture on the back of which he was pasting the finishing paper.

The work done, Mattsson glanced at his watch. Seeing it was past twelve he put his work aside and decided to quit for the night. He passed his hand wearily across his pallid face. He heaved a sigh and stretched out his hand to turn out the light. But as he did so he gave a start and stared at his white bloodless hand illumined by the lamplight. He stood motionless, looking at his hand.

"Reminds you somewhat of Dagmar's hand, doesn't it?" the phantom whispered. "You remember that time in the hospital, just before she died. You were giving her the little penknife you had bought, and she reached out her white thin hand to receive it. Remember how your heart was stabbed!—Yah, but that's not what I came to tell you. I wanted to say this—what's the use of you wearing yourself out this way, working until far into the night? Are you any the richer for it? And who has any money to spend for pictures these days anyway? Why, people haven't got enough for bread! . . .

"I see—you're still looking at your hand. You don't pay attention to what I am saying about bread. You're thinking of your little girl that's dead and gone. Well, let me tell you this: I'm a mighty ruler, and you shall yet be aware of your body's hunger! . . . Hear the wind whistling along the eaves-trough! Like a shriek, isn't it? Like a cry from the shadowy realms that claimed your Dagmar.—Right, bury your face in your hands! Let your body shake with sobs; no one is here to watch your weakness. Tears—I am used to them—anguish, moans and curses and despair! I am a mighty ruler!"

A FURIOUS banging on the outside door made Hanna sit up straight in bed. "Jesus!" she cried. "Who's that?"

Both she and Peter flung the blanket aside and jumped out of bed. Hanna groped her way to the table and lit the lamp, the light flickering up into her pale frightened face. Peter got into his trousers in a hurry. The banging continued; frantic poundings that broke loudly upon the stillness of the night.

Hanna ran to the door. "Who is it?" she cried, her voice husky with anxiety.

Out on the landing a woman's voice shouted an answer.

"Who?" Hanna demanded again; she was all atremble.

"Elsa!—It's me, Elsa! Open, for God's sake! Open!"

Hanna quickly turned the key in the lock and pushed the door open. From out of the blackness on the stairs a dark figure stumbled into the hall. Hanna felt Elsa's arms about her; the girl clung to her, sobbing hysterically. "He hasn't come back! . . . Fru Hammar!—Oh, God! He hasn't come back! . . ."

"Elsa! Elsa! Be quiet! Whom do you mean—your father?"

"Yah, he hasn't come home yet and it's almost one o'clock. Oh, what do you think can have happened?" Her words were drowned by her sobbing.

"Elsa—come in." Hanna led the girl into the living-room. In the lamplight Elsa's face showed up puffed and swollen from her weeping.

The children were awakened by the noise and sat up in bed, rubbing their eyes dazedly. "Lie down!" Hanna told them. "Go to sleep!"

She pulled Elsa down on a chair. "Elsa, Elsa, be calm!" she admonished the girl, but she herself was completely unnerved. She sought Peter's eyes where he stood by the cradle, rocking the baby to sleep.

There was a silence in the room. Only Elsa's sobbing was heard. She took her hands from her face and looked imploringly at Hanna. "What do you think can have happened?" she whispered, anguished. "Oh, if only my brother was home—Axel!"

Hanna had no answer. Her eyes were large and dark with forebodings. She rocked her body. From outside the windows came a faint moaning of the wind. Otherwise the night was still.

ELSA'S cries awakened Dahl and Fru Dahl next door. "I wonder what's the matter?" the young Fru said to her husband.

"I don't know. . . . She seems to be quieting down."

They lay silent for a while, thinking. Fru Dahl snuggled close to her Anders. "I am so afraid," she quavered. "Anders—suppose they don't let you go back to work after the strike?"

He put his arms around her. "I know they won't take me back," he replied darkly. "They've blacklisted me all right because of the work I did for the union. There's a whole lot of us they've marked down."

Again they were silent. Dahl felt the warm young body of his wife close to his own. From Hammar's flat came an occasional murmur of voices. They heard Hanna speaking.

Anders drew his wife still closer to him. "Greta, darling," he said. "Don't worry about things. We're young. And by Jesus, they're not going to knock me down as easily as all that! Listen, I'll tell you something. If the worst should happen and I don't get any work, what do you say about going to America?"

He felt her start in his arms. "America!" she repeated. "Anders . . .!"

"Sure, why not? America is a free land. There you can make something of your life. Here, the more you work the less you have!"

She made no answer. They were lying locked in each other's arms, staring into the darkness and listening to the clock ticking away up on the wall.

"What do you say, Greta?" Anders asked after a pause.

"But where'll we get the money? It'll cost a whole lot to go."

"Oh, I can fix that. I can borrow some on our life insurance. We'll get a few kronor for our furniture, too. And we don't have to travel first class, you know, you baby. All we want is to get across the water, and don't you worry, you'll see your Anders make a go of it!"

He felt her pressing closer to him. "Kiss me," she whispered.

He kissed her yielding lips. In their tight embrace they could feel the beatings of each other's hearts. Gently Anders stroked the soft cheek of his young wife; his hand travelled down to her bosom, lingering a moment to cup over her firm breast, then gliding caressingly along the curve of her slender waist, exploring the loveliness of her body.

"Gretal . . ." She felt his hot kisses on her lips, on her cheeks, her forehead, her eyes.

"We're still young," he murmured. "Darling . . ."

Darkness was about them. They spoke no more. The phantom that went visiting in the night retreated from the side of these two, for they were too young to give ear to him; they still had too much hope, and too much love.

BUT others also were awake that night. Hjalmar Strömb erg was restlessly pacing the floor, up and down, up and down, endlessly. His face had a harassed expression; in his eyes was a distracted, far-away look.

He flung himself down on a chair and sat absorbed in thoughts. Before him on the table lay an open book on civil engineering and a sheet of paper with some roughly sketched diagrams.

He sat motionless, thinking, brooding. The lamplight fell on his face and revealed a network of fine lines under his eyes.

The phantom stood by his side. "Still up?" he whispered. "He-he! I understand—trying to make the most of your enforced idleness, am I not right? These strike days are your university days, you brave, undaunted fellow. Yah, yah. But don't you think your struggle is a little pathetic for all that? I mean in its futility. Be sensible now; how can a poor, uneducated worker like you ever reach the heights of which you're dreaming? Even if you do spend all your nights applying yourself to your studies, how can you hope to catch up

with those well-prepared youths who sail smartly from high school into college on papa's money and enjoy the advantages of expert instruction. It's very fine, of course, trying to defy all obstacles and make your own way. It's a mark of sterling character and all that, but it doesn't mean your frantic struggles will ever result in anything definite. You know well enough that during your studying you waste a lot of precious time straying into by-paths and blind alleys. And isn't it a fact that something unforeseen always happens each time you have managed to save up a little money—and presto!—your savings are gone? Last year, for example, it was your mother who needed hospital care; now it's the strike. . . .

"Hjalmar—do you hear the clock ticking away up there on the wall? Do you know what it is doing? It's chopping little pieces off your life, a lot of little used-up pieces of youth that fall into the black abyss of Time. Hjalmar—you can't see all the little wheels spinning inside the case, can you—spinning round, round, furiously? That's Time spinning away! That's your youth racing off to be lost forever in a past behind you. You can't stop those wheels, Hjalmar. Even if you smash the clock and trample the works under your heel the spinning will go on, round, round, inexorably; no human hand is able to hold back the swift passage of Time.

"And yet—there's still some youth left in you. You still have a little of what's most precious in the world. How are you going to use these few remaining hours? Shall you waste them all here with your diagrams, chasing a dream that's always eluding your grasp?—Hjalmar!—Love is sweet; the lips of young girls are red and soft, their bodies lithe and graceful; young girls have firm budding breasts to be kissed and caressed; their skin is smooth to your hand; their gleaming

limbs are wondrous. Youth, Hjalmar! Youth and love! Lips against lips in intoxicating bliss. Body close to body in passionate embrace—the mind drunk with love and oblivious to the flight of time. Hjalmar, the wheels are spinning. And you are alone. And your soul is hungry, and your heart is parched with longing. . . .

“So, so! Don’t get so despondent! You’re heaping upon yourself so many unnecessary worries, and all just because you have such ambition. You, with your bridge-building dreams. No, no! Don’t bang your fist on the table that way! My! You’ll wake the whole house! Be calm! Be calm! I was just trying to tell you what’s right. My, my! Now you’ve wakened your mother. Here she comes, poor woman, all shaking with fright. You’re all so touchy these days. Yah, yah, I’ll be on my way. I think I’ll go visiting a friend of yours—Erland, that foolish little boy; there’s another one worrying himself sick with ambition. And don’t I know an easy way to get to him? Just let me use that bridge up there on your picture—the Bridge of Dreams. A pretty title, that is. Yah, so long, I’ll be floating—along—on the Bridge of Dreams. . . .”

ERLAND awoke. The night seemed full of portents. From the living-room came sobs and subdued weeping. His mother was talking in low, entreating tones. Peter's grave voice was heard. And then, between the sobs, some other person made answer, and Erland recognized the voice of Elsa Krok.

Crouching under the blanket he lay staring wide-eyed into the dark. He heard his father say something about the strike. Then followed a long silence.

A strange fear took hold of him. He could hardly breathe. He glanced out through the window where in the greyish dark of the windy night the tree stood swaying its branches like an immense apparition with uplifted arms. Erland felt a jumble of thoughts come tumbling upon him, flashes of imagery and fragments of talk he had heard from elder folks about him.—Outside the People's House a milling crowd of grim-faced workers. On the wall of the building big placards:

Don't Fail Yourself!

Latest News from the Field
of Battle

Workers Stand Firm!

.... Tanner Gren speaking to his mother: "I say, 'God help us if we lose this fight!' His mother crying secretly as she mops the floors of the post-office. His father returning home from work at night, a brooding expression in his eyes.

Erland lay back in bed, shivering and nervous. He felt frail and insufficient inside, too frail for the great burdens life puts on the shoulders of people. And he felt shame and humiliation because of his weakness.—"You with your poetry and your nonsense!" an accusing voice scoffed him. "Such as you are not needed. The world wants strong men who can blast rocks and fashion things out of iron and steel. The world needs men of power and guts, not moon-struck poets. What will you do with yourself, you who are so timid and shrinking?"

Erland found no word in reply. He lay tense and rigid under the blanket, his heart heavy with oppression. An appalling vista spread out before his inward vision—first the moulding-shop, the dark smoky shop and the monotonous work; the dull-faced Jönsson tramping the floor and twisting his soiled handkerchief while he chuckled idiotically at the filthy stories related by salesman Lund.

—The shop and all that would follow after. Life with its unending toil, its coarseness, its brutality. The life-and-death struggle of all the poor people he knew. All the poor in Flint Street. His own nameless yearning.

From the living-room came Peter's voice, strangely solemn in the night's quiet. Erland felt a sudden wild need to run in and speak to his parents and tell them what he felt and perhaps be relieved from his fear, but he refrained, knowing they would not understand.

He felt small, small in the darkness. The night seemed

charged with a host of menacing forces, and at the other end of the slow-moving hours stood dawn with its grim challenge.

He heard the wind rustling in the tree outside the window. At intervals one of the branches tapped at the window pane—knock, knock—as if the tree felt lonely out there in the starless night.

THE phantom stalked through Flint Street where a dim light shone from many a window although the night was far advanced. The invisible presence went visiting, from home to home, and was everywhere met by pale, set faces and anguished hearts, curses and tears. But no door could be barred to him.

From house to house. He stalked the street in the night. He climbed over the furniture piled on the curb. "My, my, such miserable stuff!" he muttered. "It's a good thing to have one's heart protected by an iron casing. Now look at those shabby scraps of furniture! Look at that easy chair lying on the ground. My, my! How the poor folks were saving and sacrificing and adding öre to öre to get that chair! Don't I remember? That chair was the pride of the house. Quite touching, I think, how the mother would be chasing the children out of it at nights when father got home from work. 'Twas his chair, so to speak. Father's chair. Gave him a feeling of coziness and home comfort to sit there and read his paper. Hm, yah, and now here it is on the street, getting all

wet and spoiled. It's too bad! Too bad! But I'll have to be on my way. I've got to see them all tonight. Most of them are awake, and those that aren't—oh, I can easily reach them in their dreams. People sleep so lightly these days anyway. He-he. Yah—I'm getting a trifle tired of mocking.—After all . . . within the iron casing. . . . Oh, my, what a time this is!"

He proceeded on in the blowy night, the wind fluttering the loose garments about his gaunt figure. But presently he raised his head and peered intently ahead into the dark. Shuffling footsteps were approaching. Into the circle of foggy light of a street lamp stepped the stooping figure of a slim young man, his bare head close-cropped.

"Ah!—Crazy Anton!" the phantom mumbled, gazing at the youth who halted under the lamp and stood motionless, looking ahead with unseeing eyes.

Crazy Anton he was called by the neighbors. He was allowed to come and go as he wished, for he had long ago proved himself harmless. A peculiar change had come to his face since that day he had so unexpectedly returned home from America. He was getting younger and he was getting older. As memory gradually faded from his shattered mind the lines on his face smoothed out, and obliterated were all signs of the suffering he had endured alone in a foreign land. But even as the past no longer could reach him neither did the present impinge upon his consciousness. Past, present and future—they had become one to him. Time and all that it holds of stress and struggle, unfulfilled hopes and elusive glimpses of joy—time touched him more lightly than the wafts of wind brushing him by. Eternity itself seemed to have taken human form in his sculptured features now almost as smooth as those of a child.

Crazy Anton stood still under the lamp whose misty glow sifted down upon his ageless face marked only by that touch of gentle sadness which seemed to reside in the very mould of his visage. His unseeing gaze was directed into the darkness. He took an aimless step. He moved on, out of the range of lamplight.

The phantom fell back. "I hail thee!" he spoke, "disciple of one mightier than I. Thy master—I know him. *Hunger of the Soul* be his name, the *Heart's Unutterable Despair, Loneliness Unfathomable*."

"Anton—you have again been wandering about in the night. Did perhaps a call reach you—a cry like that which once, long ago, froze your heart . . . you remember, when your brother Sven went down in the icy waters of the Willow-Lakes . . . ?

"You do not answer. You do not hear. Your eyes see nothing. Pass on. Mortal fear and travail—all this you have left behind. Over such as you I have no power."

ONE of the last visited by the phantom that night was a man with greying hair. His small room was crowded with overflowing book cases, and the work table at which he sat was strewn with pamphlets and sheets of paper.

He was busily writing in the shaded light of a reading lamp. He added sheet after sheet to the many he had already scribbled full; he wrote feverishly as if prompted by a great inspiration.

But suddenly the pen came to a stop. The man covered his tired eyes with his hand. His face looked weary. His brow was deeply furrowed.

Thus he sat, in the silence of his study, the dim lamplight flowing over the table and the sheaf of papers.

The phantom approached him and glanced over his shoulder. "I see," he whispered, half mocking, "—drafting a speech again! Something for the hungry strikers who'll be at the meeting tomorrow. He-he! How many such speeches have you written in your life? Do you really think they do any good—any good at all, I mean? Are you still quite sure that

peaceful action is the right road to liberty for the toiling masses?—Yah, naturally, if you still believe so after all these years of struggle . . . hm, don't you think a little force—I mean, that a quick, masterful stroke would be more effective? Be reasonable now. Wouldn't such a procedure be vastly more desirable than this snail-like creeping through arid deserts of dusty papers; all these countless debates? You know you're weary unto death of your drab existence—this ceaseless bickering between the two opposing parties, this endless haggling for a few öres' increase of the hourly wage, these paltry suspicions and jealousies within the workers' own ranks.

"Dear friend—admit that you're desperate; admit that your soul is yearning for a splash of color in your monotonous life. Are you not shriveling up and sapped bloodless here among your mouldy old books? Wouldn't it be better to tear up these papers which you yourself so often have damned? Tear them up and rise from your table and help rally your comrades to heroic action! Who knows, you might be victorious.—Or do you still prefer this starvation war? Couldn't you do something—something better than to bicker and haggle and make speeches . . . ?"

The man at the table heaved a sigh. He looked at the sheet of paper in his hand, then plunged back into his deep thoughts.

"You are thinking," the phantom continued. "Yah—in a few hours dawn will break and you'll stand before the starved crowds to deliver your message. I do think this is a right good moment to glance back down the many long years and take stock of yourself.

"Friend—you must still remember that day in spring when it all started. You were working in the carpenter shop, and

time and again your gaze flew out through the window to the glittering sunshine.

“Of a sudden you felt a stirring within you. A vision flashed upon you. In a moment you were aware, as never before, of the shameful injustice of a society which for generation after generation holds its toilers chained to soul-killing drudgery; where one man is allowed to live upon another; and where the badge of poverty and slavery is fastened on to new-born babes.

“Friend, do you remember how in that illumined moment your strong workman’s hand trembled about the tool with which you were working? You were aching to build a new world where all men would be free and proud and none would be called a thrall. Did not in that great moment flow into your soul all the enthusiasm and force and power of which you have given during all these years, all these wearisome years which you could not easily forget?”

The man pushed the sheet of paper away from him. He put his elbow on the table and rested his head on his hand. He sat motionless while his memory conjured up scene after scene from his past. He saw himself as a young, untutored workman, bursting with zeal, tramping the muddy roads to all sorts of mean districts in his efforts to waken toil-dulled minds to a vision of a fairer world.

The recollections flowed before his inward eye in a continuous stream. He recalled all the abuse and humiliation he had suffered in those days of his young manhood when his heart, as now, was sick with pity for the poor—those days when he was often scoffed at and heckled by the very ones he was trying to help.

He again picked up the sheet of paper from the table and

tried to free himself from his depressing thoughts. He reached for his pen and made an effort to go on writing, but the phantom's whispering voice distracted him anew: "There is much more for you to remember," the nocturnal visitor spoke. "And it might be well for you to recall. Remember that time you were attacked by a gang of rowdy mill hands; the scar on your cheek ought to remind you how they beat you unconscious and left you bleeding at the roadside. And I wish you to recall your frequent prison sojourns occasioned by some spoken or written word said to violate the law. Also, do not forget those worthy causes you have championed, many of which were lost when you and your comrades were defeated by forces stronger than you—by men's selfishness, ignorance and greed. I want you to remember all this tonight, before you go on with your speech—you whom I hail among my foremost disciples: For do you not know, from your own experience, the erosive effects on Man's soul of the constant action of poverty? I am *Hunger*. You know me.

"Friend—you have given your youth, and your young manhood; you have sacrificed for your cause all that men value in comfort and ease. And now this whole land is plunged into social war. All about you the poor are suffering. Do you still believe that the path you chose long ago is the path that will lead to your goal?"

The man sat slumped in his chair, his eyes closed, his head sunk forward on his breast. The room was without a sound; the lamplight poured softly over the paper-littered table. Outside the windows was stillness, too; the wind had subsided.

Slowly he lifted his head. He put his strong hands on the table, clasping them in a passionate grip. "I still believe as I did in my youth," he spoke fervently. "Light, light in the

darkness! Out of the souls of men shall grow their power to be free. . . . My comrades—all you who are suffering . . . we are building on rock—a world with justice for all men and oppression of none. . . .”

But the phantom remained by his side. Again he bent down to whisper: “Suppose I revealed to you the final outcome of this great strike; how you will be forced to compromise and call your forces to retreat—these many thousands who now are sacrificing to their uttermost, believing you will lead them to victory, these thousands whose homes are being wrecked and whose children will for years to come suffer the consequences of the starvation they now endure. Suppose I were to show how your organizations will be ripped up and weakened, how masses of workers will be persecuted and humbled, and how this gigantic contest will gradually shrink and be frittered to shreds and to nothing, leaving in its wake deep wounds and much bitterness and pain, all without the gains for which you went into battle?”

The man sprang to his feet. His worn face was deathly pale. “And then,” he cried, “I would still go on! I would still believe that this dreadful struggle has not been altogether in vain! . . . Where human eyes see only defeat . . . there—out of all these sacrifices—perhaps some small seed will reach fruitful soil—and will grow . . . in times to come. . . .”

To the phantom’s hollow-eyed countenance came a startling change, and his emaciated features were illumined as with a clear light. His gaze followed the man who walked slowly to the window where he stood looking out into the night, his arms uplifted, his hands resting on the window jambs. “How much unhappiness out there!” he mumbled. “How much agony! How much despair! How much fear that will flare

up to new life when morning breaks! Almighty God, how are human beings made that anyone can be content in the possession of affluence while round about their palaces others are starving and homeless?"

He lifted his gaze above the black mass of house-tops. A faint light was beginning to thin out the darkness as dawn approached. The white stars were paling. They appeared slowly to withdraw from the nearness of earth and its strife and unrest; the calm stars, one by one, seemed to retreat back into their celestial regions, in whose womb, unknown to man, other worlds are coming into being; where fiery nebulae and galaxies of flaming suns pass majestically through their aeonian cycles of growth toward an ultimate fulfillment in the incomprehensible scheme of the Cosmos.

The man took a deep breath and turned from the window. Calm had reentered his face. He stood immovable for a moment, while the morning light filtered in from outside. Over on the table the reading lamp still shone with a pale yellowish glow. The man walked up and put out the light. The phantom had vanished.

AND so, in the bleak morning, there was again a heavy tramping of feet as the workers flocked to the People's Park. Every day, during the strike, they had assembled on the meeting ground to hear the latest news from the battle field and to receive instructions from their leaders. Every day they had come, these stern-mouthing men and women. They had gathered in their park and tried with song and music to hold on to their courage, to forget for a moment their drab homes and their children crying for food, to forget their own hunger. With music and song they had tried to lift their souls to new courage. They had sung, trying to silence the lurking dread in their hearts.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. They were marching to the park. They came from all directions, from Flint Street, from all the dreary streets where Hunger, that loathed spectre, was stalking about, wreaking havoc among the harassed tenement-dwellers. Tramp, tramp; the sound of their footsteps a dull monotonous tramp, tramp, an ominous sound, men marching,

men with sad inward-looking eyes, an endless tramping as if all toiling humanity were on the march.

Tramp, tramp, a dark stream of close-lipped men between rows of mounted police imposing in brass-peaked helmets and other military trappings, gleaming sabers at their side. There's an oppressive silence, broken only by the sound of tramping footsteps, and the neighing and the hoof-beats of the policemen's restless horses.

The workers are streaming into the park where the meeting ground is gradually filled. A murmur of voices is in the air. Presently, over by the speakers' platform, someone shouts a command and the men start singing; through their crowded ranks runs a pealing sound as of a blast of wind sweeping across the sea.

We go forth, forth to fight for human freedom and right,
And what's heavy for one is for many shoulders light.

.....

A speaker steps up on the platform, his face grey after his all-night vigil. He has a sheaf of papers rolled up in his hand. He waits till the song is ended, then he speaks:

"Comrades. Not in vain did we appeal to the world proletariat for help in our struggle. In these days of trial the spirit of the brotherhood of Man burns with a strong, clear flame. Help has come to us from all parts of the world, and the most needy of you will today be given a little money.

"I say the most needy. I wish every one of you could have been given something wherewith to alleviate your distress, for you are well worthy of a reward for your brave stand in this crisis. But even the most destitute among you can be given

only a very small share—hardly a loaf of bread will it buy you. But, please, remember that what our friends in other countries have sent us has not come from abundance. Each small coin you will hold in your hand represents a sacrifice by some unknown worker—perhaps in Italy, in France, America, or some other part of the world. I beg you to accept your small share of relief in that spirit."

When he had finished the strike committee began distributing the relief to the most impoverished among the workers. One by one the men walked up and received their share.

After this was done the speaker again asked silence.

"Friends," he began. "The relief has been distributed. According to regulations only the organized among you were entitled to aid. But I ask you to consider one thing. When the order for a general strike sounded, not only the organized workers obeyed the call. The great triumph for our cause is that we were joined also by those who did not have the backing of unions. Every third man among you is unorganized, and thus, according to rules, not entitled to relief. But—friends—hunger visits organized and unorganized alike. I will say no more. . . ."

A deep silence fell upon the crowds. For a long while not one man in that whole gathering made a move nor spoke a word. They stood still, looking before them, or staring at the ground. Their faces were drawn and stern. They were tight-lipped and solemn.

At last there was a stirring among them. A man walked slowly toward the table where the strike committee had distributed the relief. He was a big, heavily built fellow with a hulking gait. He stepped to the table and stood looking from

one to the other of the committee members who were watching him intently.

On the table was a box in which the relief money had been kept. The man looked at the box. He seemed to hesitate at first, but then he stretched out his hand and dropped into the box the money he had been given a few minutes before. He stood for a moment staring at the coins in the box, then he turned back. A strange, far-away expression was on his peaked face. He looked at no one. But presently his body began to shake with suppressed sobs. All eyes were on him. He turned his face away.

The men looked at each other. They stared at the ground. They appeared restless as if some inner voice were prompting them to action, but their feet seemed to hold them back.

Then another man detached himself from the rest and walked to the table and dropped his money into the box. He also returned, pale-faced and tense, his hands rammed deep into his trouser pockets.

A third man followed the example of the other two. And so, one by one, the men trooped to the table and returned their money. When it was done they stood about, waiting, not knowing what to do.

The relief committee hurriedly counted the money. When finished they gave the result to the speaker on the platform. He turned forward and looked out over the white sea of faces. He stood still, erect and straight, his head thrown slightly back, his eyes strangely bright in his drawn set face.

The crowds were waiting for him to speak. There was a deep hush, a silence seemingly intensified by the bleak gleams of light that fell down in broad shafts from rifts in the clouded sky.

The speaker raised his voice. "Comrades," he said. "You have returned two-thirds of what was given you."

He paused. He was visibly moved. His gaze travelled far beyond the silent masses before him. Then once more he stirred himself. His voice rang out vibrantly as he repeated: "You have returned two-thirds of what was given you! . . . There is little I can say here, for this act of yours will forever blaze mightily in the history of Man's advance toward freedom. I have witnessed a victory for the disinherited on earth such as I had never dreamt of. From sagas and legends the world has come to know about heroic deeds done in ancient times here in our misty North. But now shall be told the true tale of how men of today have achieved that which outshines all slaying of dragons and all high conquest with battle-axe and sword. For hungry and distressed men have in the midst of their own great need shown compassion for their comrades. —I thank you with all my heart. . . ."

He interrupted himself. His face was as white as the white papers he held in his hand. Slowly he began tearing up the sheets. With the fragments in his hand he climbed down from the platform. The strike committee redistributed the money.

Then the meeting broke up. And that night there was bread in many a worker's home.

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